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Jay Leist

Joyce Scott

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Academic Leadership Journal

Jay Leist* and Joyce A. Scott**

Introduction

Research into higher education as a field of study is impeded by the lack of an authoritative database of all graduate programs in the United States. One resource used frequently is the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) database, which is self-reported by the host institutions. In 2008, this database indicated that approximately 77 higher education (HIED) programs awarded the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), 91 offered the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and 35 awarded both degrees. This distribution recalls questions that have marked research in the field for 80 years: how do HIED programs differentiate between the two degrees? Are both degrees really necessary?

This concern for differentiation was called “an inconclusive battle” by the Carnegie Foundation (2003, p. 5), which has since launched an initiative to redefine the Ed.D. Approximately 11 years after Harvard University awarded the first Ed.D., Freeman (1931) labeled it a substitute or supplement for the Ph.D. He identified several concerns, including the elimination of a foreign language requirement, the need for professional experience, and the use of a thesis that “organizes existing knowledge instead of discovering new truth” (p. 1). These concerns led him to question awarding the Ed.D. in lieu of the Ph.D.

Following Freeman, various researchers examined the Ed.D. and Ph.D. and proposed ways to address the confusion between them. Proposals ranged from deleting one degree in favor of the other (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Deering, 1998; Osguthorpe & Wong, 1993) to differentiating one degree from the other (Dill & Morrison, 1985; Toma, 2002). This latter proposal—to clearly distinguish the Ed.D. from the Ph.D.—serves as the basis for the research at hand.

The purpose of this study is to assess, in light of past researchers’ recommendations, how a sample of HIED programs differentiates between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Colleges of Education have traditionally described the Ed.D. as a practitioner’s degree, designed to produce future leaders, and the Ph.D. as a research degree, intended to prepare future university faculty (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). Because many studies have indicated that the differentiation between practitioner and researcher no longer exists, this study will concentrate on two areas. First, in selected HIED programs, what are the advertised foci of the two degrees (i.e., practitioner- or research-oriented)? Second, in selected HIED programs, what characteristics differentiate the Ed.D. from the Ph.D.? To answer this latter question, the study will examine total credit hours, program admission, residency, HIED core courses, specializations or cognates, electives, internships, qualifying/comprehensive examinations, dissertation focus and hours, and research tools. As an overarching goal, this article seeks to update the research, determine if past studies have had any influence on the HIED field of study and, in light of the findings, recommend to the profession an appropriate course of action.

Literature Review

Although the first courses were introduced by G. Stanley Hall in 1893 (Goodchild, 1991), HIED is a relative newcomer in Colleges of Education. As late as 1974, Dressel and Mayhew noted that the study of HIED had yet to mature, even though “it possesses many attributes of a scholarly field” (p. 1). These authors defined HIED as a field of study, noting that it “includes research, service, and formally organized programs of instruction in post-secondary education leading to a master’s degree, educational specialist or other two-year certificate or degree, or doctorate” (p. 2). Over the years, the study of the Ed.D. and of HIED programs has addressed three topics: the relative purpose and status of the Ed.D. vs. the Ph.D., the comparative content of the two HIED curricula, and the capstone component of the two HIED degrees.

Any analysis of the two degrees must begin with their lineage. The Ph.D. traces its origins to the great universities of Europe and was first awarded in the United States in 1861 by Yale University (Spurr, 1970). The first Ph.D. in education was awarded in 1893 by Teachers College, Columbia University (Brown, 1990; Shulman et al., 2006). Harvard University awarded the first Ed.D. in 1920 (Brown, 1990) as a professional doctorate managed by the School of Education (Spurr, 1970), an arrangement that departed from traditional practice wherein the Ph.D. was controlled by Colleges of Arts and Sciences or Graduate Schools.

Since the introduction of the Ed.D., scholarly debate has centered on the relative purposes of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in education. Freeman raised the first concerns about differentiation (Brown, 1990), but Hollis (1942) may have coined the respective “practitioner” and “researcher” descriptors. Describing the Ed.D. as designed for “practicing school men” and the Ph.D. as a degree “to meet the needs of collegiate specialists in education” (pp. 261-262), he noted that “the lines of demarcation between the two degrees have become increasingly indistinct” (p. 262). In 1955, Saalbach confirmed the lack of distinction following his study of catalogues and personal interviews with institutional representatives who raised other concerns about the Ed.D.: the admissions criteria, the nature of residency requirements, the intended purpose of comprehensive examinations, and the focus of and standards for a dissertation. Commenting on the perceived lack of respect for the degree, Saalbach (1955) nonetheless advocated professionalizing the Ed.D. to make it more practitioner-oriented, effective, and respectable.

Spurr (1970) labeled the Ed.D. a second-class doctorate for which students settled when no other option was available but called for “a truly professional Doctor of Education program as challenging and difficult in its own way as the Doctor of Philosophy” (p. 142). In his view, the Ed.D. served a specific purpose: with its lower admissions selectivity, it permitted Colleges of Education to recruit promising students whose credentials might not have qualified them for admission to a Ph.D. program.

Recently, Shulman et al. labeled the Ed.D. as plagued by “chronic and crippling” problems (2006, p. 25). Citing several specific issues addressed below, these researchers concluded that institutions have moved the Ed.D. away from its original intent, an effort that has led to the degree being labeled “Ph.D.-Lite” (p. 27) and a “low-end Ph.D.” (p. 25).

Much of the criticism of the Ed.D. has also informed the study of HIED programs. Dressel and Mayhew (1974) were the first to perform an in-depth analysis of the differences between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. within HIED. After examining 36 HIED programs offering both doctorates, these authors labeled the differences as “not entirely clear. In substance . . . the basic distinction . . . is whether their orientation is

research or practitioner” (p. 47). These authors were also troubled about HIED programs that were implementing Ph.D. curricula with a greater practitioner orientation. Using the “practitioner vs. researcher” comparison, Dressel and Mayhew (1974) emphasized how HIED programs were preparing Ph.D. seekers to serve as “administrators, teachers, or other personnel in a manner which other universities would insist is the function of an Ed.D.” (p. 54). For programs offering the Ed.D. and Ph.D., these researchers advocated distinctiveness between the degrees.

Similar issues were raised by successive scholars. Richardson and Walsh (1978) examined 18 HIED programs and found “continuing convergence” (p. 6) of the two degrees over 11 separate components. These authors ultimately concluded that, for their respondents, the differences between the two doctorates might be more philosophical than operational. Dill and Morrison (1985) surveyed 75 institutions, of which 35 offered both doctorates in HIED, and learned that almost half of the “institutions reported no difference in research course requirements between their Ph.D. and Ed.D. degree programs, although several institutions require evidence of competence in a foreign language in addition to statistics and methods courses for their Ph.D.” (p. 173). In 1987, Carpenter noted that the in-place requirements for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. were ambiguous but recommended no changes. In the 1990s, Osguthorpe and Wong (1993) confirmed the similarities between the two degrees, and Deering (1998), following his analysis of institutional catalogues, judged that “most of the important distinctions have become obscured over the years” (p. 243). Finally, Toma (2002) summarized the situation as follows: “we have either watered down the Ph.D. to accommodate students who have little interest in research and discovery, or we have prepared other students for administrative practice by focusing on research skills” (Toma, 2002, p. 14).

Discussion about convergence of the two degrees often focuses on the curricula. Dressel and Mayhew (1974) identified several curricular areas particular to each degree. For example, the Ed.D. included an internship or other field experience and a dissertation focused on applied or practical issues whereas the Ph.D. stipulated additional requirements such as foreign language proficiency (or a substitute), a longer residency, and differences in the required credit hours within and outside of education (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974).

Subsequent researchers have not found these distinctions as clear. Clifford and Guthrie (1988) argued that too many colleges had wrongly flavored their Ed.D. degrees with Ph.D.-type requirements, causing students to squander “time, university resources, and an opportunity to gain more appropriate professional preparation” (p. 336). As such, Ed.D. curricula required “research and practicum experiences geared to practical situations” (p. 336). Osguthorpe and Wong (1993), using survey data and catalogue trends, also found a high level of similarity between the Ed.D. and Ph.D.—to include requirements for research and statistics.

Shulman et al. (2006) faulted Ed.D. curricula for providing students with Ph.D.-type academic experiences instead of leadership training and practice. In their opinion, Ed.D. programs have suffered from “subtraction, with fewer requirements than the Ph.D. and much less emphasis on full-time study and residency” (p. 27).

Toma (2002) confirmed Dill and Morrison’s findings and identified common factors appearing in programs with both doctorates; most notably, similar degree requirements, and the fact that Ed.D. and Ph.D. students enrolled in many of the same classes—including research methods courses. In his view, this lack of distinction has done a disservice to students and HIED programs.

The final focus of HIED scholarship relates to the student's capstone experience. Dill and Morrison (1985) found that, as far as research objectives were concerned, Ph.D. students were more involved in so-called "pure research" while individuals seeking an Ed.D. pursued "applied" research. Coorough and Nelson (1991) found that dissertations (in various educational fields, including HIED) overwhelmingly emphasized applied (88%) versus basic (12%) research. Ed.D. studies relied more on descriptive research and yielded results aimed at "the local level, such as an institution, a state, or region" (p. 8). Ph.D. studies employed more multivariate statistics and "were inferred to national or international . . . settings" (p. 8). These authors found no difference in the incidence of significant findings between Ed.D. and Ph.D. dissertations.

Deering's 1998 study concluded that the one difference between Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs lay in the focus of the doctoral dissertation. Typically, the Ph.D. required a scholarly dissertation, while the Ed.D. involved an applied dissertation. Toma (2002) explained that, over time, the Ed.D. has been promoted as a degree to develop "researching professionals," while the Ph.D. has been used to train "professional researchers" (p. 4). Calling such distinctions "a fiction across American higher education programs" (p. 4), he suggested the Ed.D. be restructured to embrace more practitioner-based and innovative requirements. Finally, Shulman et al. (2006) criticized the very notion of a dissertation as a requirement for the Ed.D., noting "the capstone requirement is some form of dissertation, although practitioners are unlikely to ever be asked to produce research like it again" (p. 27).

Despite an abundance of past research questioning the differentiation between the two degrees, it appears that little has changed since Freeman (1931) first surfaced his concerns about the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Since his commentary, countless studies have repeatedly addressed the "blurring" that has affected the purpose, status, and curricular components of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in HIED programs—to the point that few, if any, differences seem to exist.

Methodology

To identify the 35 HIED programs offering both an Ed.D. and Ph.D., the researchers utilized the Higher Education Program Directory (ASHE, 2008). This database provided information from membership files and self-reported updates concerning HIED graduate degrees. The Directory offered contact information and the curricular emphasis of each degree, including such popular areas as student affairs, community college leadership, teaching, leadership and policy, and administration. This dispersion of curricular emphases across 35 programs posed methodological challenges because HIED programs emphasizing one area (e.g., student affairs) often incorporated coursework common to a different focus (e.g., leadership and policy). Further, some of the 35 programs showed curricular commonality with programs in Educational Administration (EDAD), that is, incorporating many of the same foundations and tools courses. Once these courses were completed, students focused on one of the two areas of concentration (i.e., EDAD or HIED).

Considering the various foci of all programs would have created an unwieldy database and complicated the analysis of how HIED programs differentiate between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Therefore, the researchers selected 12 of the original 35 programs listed in the Higher Education Program Directory (ASHE, 2008). This selection was based on two factors. In addition to offering both the Ed.D. (or D.Ed.) and Ph.D., each program had to be advertised specifically as either Higher Education or Higher Education Administration—with no concentration in student affairs, community college

leadership, etc. All but two of the programs were located at public universities, with seven classified as research/very high research activity and the remaining five categorized as research/high research activity (Carnegie Foundation, 2009).

To gain insight into the advertised foci of these programs and, more importantly, to understand the specific characteristics used to differentiate the Ed.D. from the Ph.D., the researchers examined curricular information (for Academic Year 2008-2009) posted on the web site of each institution. A variety of primary data sources (e.g., program overviews, student handbooks, course descriptions, and degree-planning forms) described the nature and composition of the curricula. The researchers also examined information listed on the various College of Education and Graduate College web sites. Taken together, all of these sources provided an in-depth understanding for each degree.

As evidenced in the work of Deering (1998), Osguthorpe and Wong (1993), and Saalbach (1955), the use of such sources, including catalogues, to examine curricular components is not new. Amey (1992) used university-generated publications to study “aspects of the formal curriculum. . . . based on institutional philosophy as well as values . . . reflected in program and degree requirements” (p. 24). She emphasized how official documents can help illuminate a point-in-time intent of an academic program. While university catalogues provide an excellent source of information for determining the formal coursework within a certain discipline, other official publications (e.g., handbooks) can offer insight into the informal aspects of a curriculum.

Although the research at hand relies on Internet-based information instead of print-only documents, all of these media share similar shortcomings for curricular analysis. The lack of standardized terminology and vernacular issues can complicate the use of curricular data (Amey, 1992). Vernacular problems can also surface in degree-planning forms because institutions typically use different headings to organize courses into a cohesive degree plan. In many HIED doctoral programs, these headings include labels such as core, foundations, research tools, and dissertation hours. However, these headings—and the specific “blocks” of courses associated with them—are seldom standardized.

Besides this lack of standardization, Internet-based curricular information shares one other problem with paper-based media. Dressel and DeLisle (1969) faulted college catalogues for being poorly written, poorly organized, and inaccurate. Although computers have made it possible for institutions to clarify, streamline, and update information rapidly, many of the pitfalls noted appear across the web pages of a HIED institution. To reduce the impact of these informational shortcomings, the researchers sought e-mail or telephonic clarification from respective program coordinators, faculty members, or administrative assistants whenever questions surfaced.

To organize data about differences between an Ed.D. and Ph.D., the researchers chose a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and set columnar headings to assemble program-specific data. These headings represented a compilation of the typical characteristics in the extant literature (e.g., Richardson & Walsh, 1978) and the personal experiences of the researchers. After entering data into the spreadsheet cells, the researchers analyzed each Ed.D. and Ph.D. degree for purpose statements and compiled and synthesized descriptive data for the various components in Items 2-4 of Table 1.

Findings

Advertised Focus of Each Degree

Analyzing the purpose statements for the 12 HIED programs revealed that the Ed.D. continues to be described as a practitioner’s degree. The words *practitioner* or *practice* appeared in seven purpose statements, while *administration* and/or *leadership* appeared in six, and *application* appeared in three. Words such as theory and/or research appeared in two statements paired contextually with practice and/or application (e.g., apply theory to practice).

Not surprisingly, the Ph.D. in each of the 12 programs adhered to its traditional foci: *research* (10 statements) or *faculty/teaching* (nine statements). Eight statements incorporated both of these terms. Words such as *administration* and/or *leadership* each appeared once, paired contextually with an academic focus (e.g., a career in administration) or research (e.g., contribute to leadership through research). For the 12 programs, the “practitioner versus researcher” dichotomy prevailed, which led the researchers to examine the level of differentiation within three component areas: entry, courses, and research (see Table 1, Items 2-4).

Table 1

HIED Doctoral Degree Data Headings (Ed.D. and Ph.D.)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advertised Focus of Each Degree (i.e., practitioner-or research-oriented); 2. Entry Components—total credit hours for the degree beyond the Master’s, program admissions requirements, and doctoral residency requirements; 3. Coursework Components—HIED core courses, HIED specialization, cognate/specialization outside HIED, electives, practica and/or internships, the qualifying/comprehensive examination; and 4. Research Components—dissertation focus (i.e., practitioner- or research-oriented), dissertation hours (minimum credit hours needed), and research tools (instruction in quantitative and/or qualitative methods).
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Entry Components

The researchers reviewed Internet-based information that prospective students might consider before choosing an Ed.D. or Ph.D.: total credit hours beyond the Master’s, program admissions criteria, and doctoral residency requirements. Table 2 indicates that, on average, the Ph.D. required approximately 5 credit hours more than the Ed.D. Nonetheless, half of the programs required the same number of credit hours for both degrees. Six Ed.D. and five Ph.D. programs required a minimum 60 credit hours beyond the Master’s. The five HIED programs requiring more credit hours for the Ph.D. typically identified extra courses in at least one area such as a cognate or minor, dissertation hours, or research tools. These areas are addressed later.

Table 2

Credit Hour Requirements

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	Ed.D.	Ph.D.
Total minimum credit hours required (beyond the Master's) ^a		
Group mean:	60.08	65.25
Group range:	38-78	42-90
Number of programs requiring a minimum total of 60 credit hours	6	5
Number of programs with same minimum total credit hours	6	6
Number of Ph.D. programs with more credit hours than Ed.D.	-	5
Mean difference of credit hours above Ed.D. group mean	-	13.20
Range of difference of credit hours above Ed.D.	-	4-30
Number of Ed.D. programs with more credit hours than Ph.D.	1	-
Mean difference of credit hours above Ph.D. group mean	4	-

^aOne institution listed a specific number of units for each degree, in lieu of credit hours. The researchers assumed 3 credit hours for each unit.

Program admissions criteria showed minimal differences: nine of the 12 HIED programs published the same criteria for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. In the other programs, differentiation ranged from a higher minimum Graduate Record Examination (GRE) score for Ph.D. applicants to a lower GRE score for the Ed.D., coupled with either minimal publishing or HIED experience or employer approval of release time for the internship associated with this degree.

Most programs showed similar doctoral residency requirements for both degrees: nine programs indicated the same number of credit hours (ranging from 18-27) for their respective Ed.D. and Ph.D. Five of these programs used the same process for completing residency (e.g., two or three consecutive terms, each with a pre-determined number of credit hours). When differentiation occurred, it favored Ed.D. students. In three programs, students could choose from various semester arrangements (e.g., two terms of 9 credit hours each, or three terms of 6 credit hours each), whereas their Ph.D. counterparts had no such alternatives. One program offered Ed.D. students a second option—an extra term to complete a residency involving 30 credit hours of work as compared to the standard 24. Despite requiring the same residency credits for each degree, one program allowed Ed.D. students an entire calendar year to complete residency, while Ph.D. students had to complete it in two consecutive terms. One HIED program did not list a residency requirement for either degree.

Course Components

Degree-plan analysis, although complicated by varying terminology, revealed how program differentiation occurs. The researchers considered several mandatory and elective components: HIED

core courses, HIED specialization, cognate/specialization outside HIED, electives, practicum and/or internship requirements, and the qualifying/comprehensive examination.

Table 3 offers descriptive data for core courses, reflecting little differentiation among these subjects. This lack of differentiation gained additional meaning when the researchers examined the level of duplication between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. Four of the 12 HIED programs showed at least 50-70% duplication between the two degrees, while another pair of programs exhibited as little as 33% commonality. One program utilized a variable number of credit hours for core courses, resulting in 40-66% duplication. Two programs indicated the selection of HIED core courses for Ph.D. students would be conducted with an advisor and/or committee. This option did not exist for Ed.D. students.

Table 3

Course Component Requirements

	Ed.D.	Ph.D.
HIED core course credit hours required ^a		
Group mean	19.83-20	21.18-21.36
Group range	9-36	9-36
Top five HIED core course subjects (frequency across 12 programs) ^b		
Organization/administration/governance	11	-
History of HIED (or education)	9	-
Finance/business in HIED	7	-
Student affairs/personnel	6	-
Professional seminar (tied with curriculum development/evaluation)	5	-
Top five HIED core course subjects (frequency across 12 programs) ^c		
History of HIED (or education)	-	8

Organization/administration/governance	-	7
Finance/business in HIED (tied with Research)	-	5
College teaching (tied with Student affairs/personnel and Issues in HIED)	-	4

^aOne institution listed a variable credit hours for both degrees. Another institution listed a specific number of units, in lieu of credit hours. The researchers assumed 3 credit hours for each unit. ^bThe next five most popular HIED core course subjects for the Ed.D. included: law, issues, research, educational theory/foundations, and ethics. ^cThe next five most popular HIED core course subjects for the Ph.D. included: law, issues, educational theory/foundations, policy, and professional seminar.

Besides requiring similar core knowledge, nine programs required additional specialization within the HIED field of study for Ed.D. and Ph.D. students. One program mandated this specialization only for Ed.D. students. The two remaining programs required no HIED coursework beyond the core. Within the nine programs requiring specialization, only five prescribed a certain number of credit hours (6-12 for the Ed.D.; 9-14 for the Ph.D.).

Four programs offered little to no differentiation in HIED specialization. One program required 16 credit hours for the Ed.D. and Ph.D., and all students used the same list of courses. Two other programs required the same number of credit hours (9 and 24, respectively) for both degrees and offered lists of specialization courses that varied only slightly: a student affairs course for the Ed.D., and one course each on publishing and policy for the Ph.D. The fourth program required 27 credit hours of specialization for the Ed.D. while the Ph.D. used this same block of courses, plus a HIED policy course.

This requirement for additional specialization in HIED led the researchers to examine the criteria for a cognate—or specialization outside of HIED (i.e., minor). How did the 12 programs address cognates and minors? Two programs required no cognate or minor for either degree; one program required a cognate for the Ph.D., with the specialization outside HIED to be determined with an advisor. Another program required a 12-credit hour minor outside of HIED for the Ph.D. No program required a cognate or minor for the Ed.D. Two other programs required Ed.D. students to complete an outside specialization; their Ph.D. counterparts had no similar requirement.

Three programs employed the same criteria for their Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees: one HIED program required an 18-credit hour minor; the second required 15 credit hours. Another HIED program specified 9 credit hours of theoretical foundations (e.g., multiculturalism, philosophy, and ethics) for students pursuing either degree. The three remaining programs distinguished between the degrees, typically requiring more courses for the Ph.D. and minor or cognate courses to be outside HIED or the College of Education. The remaining program discriminated between the minor and cognate: for both degrees, students could complete a 12-credit hour outside minor or a 15-credit hour cognate, with HIED courses accepted as a focus for both degrees.

Besides a specialization in HIED, and an outside cognate and/or specialization, seven programs

included elective requirements in one or both degrees. Two programs called for electives for the Ed.D. (6 and 15 credit hours, respectively). Two different programs required electives for the Ph.D. only, with one stipulating at least 6 credit hours of HIED and the other offering the option of 12 unspecified credit hours to improve the knowledge base.

Unspecified credit hours also surfaced in one of the programs requiring electives for both degrees: the Ed.D. required 21 credit hours, while the Ph.D. called for 14. Another program stipulated at least 6 credit hours for the Ed.D., which could include HIED, other fields of study in education, or other academic areas. For the Ph.D., however, this program required at least 15 credit hours, which could serve as a second minor. Because one program used units (versus credit hours) to depict its Ed.D. and Ph.D. curricular requirements, the researchers assumed that Ed.D. students had to complete 18 credit hours of electives while Ph.D. students had to complete 30.

The criteria for a practicum or internship provided interesting findings. Four of the 12 HIED programs required no experiential learning for either degree; another four included a practicum or internship ranging from 3-6 credits for the Ed.D. only; and two set the same practicum or internship criteria for both degrees. Among these latter two, one program required Ed.D. and Ph.D. students to complete a practicum and a field problem for 6 credits; and the other expected students to complete up to 6 credit hours of internship, based upon their prior HIED work history. Finally, two programs showed a clear differentiation between the degrees: one used a 6-credit hour practicum solely for the Ph.D. and divided coursework equally between mentored teaching and mentored research. The other program offered Ed.D. students 3-6 credit hours of supervised field experience while Ph.D. students had the opportunity to participate in 1-6 credit hours of research apprenticeship.

Descriptions of qualifying/comprehensive examinations reflected little differentiation. Of the 12 HIED programs, nine indicated a written-only format for both degrees. Two programs utilized written and oral formats, and in one case, program guidance indicated that the examination would be customized—presumably to support the specific focus of the student's work in pursuing the Ed.D. or Ph.D. Only one program overlaid the “practitioner versus researcher” dichotomy onto its description of the two examinations: for the Ed.D., students would design a practitioner-based feasibility study while Ph.D. students would design a research protocol.

Research Components

Research-related components included dissertation focus, dissertation hours, and research tools. For this study, focus refers to the manner in which programs characterized dissertations for the two degrees (i.e., practitioner- or research-oriented). The term dissertation hours denotes the minimum number of credit hours required for each degree. Research tools represent the minimum number of quantitative and/or qualitative credit hours required for each degree.

Only one program failed to specify a dissertation focus for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. The traditional “practitioner versus researcher” dichotomy, however, prevailed in the remaining 11 programs. For the Ed.D., these 11 programs focused on *practice* or *solving practical-based problems*. Two programs permitted a theoretical or research-oriented dissertation, if the Ed.D. student had the requisite research tools. A third program advertising a problem-based focus allowed Ed.D. students to pursue a theory-based dissertation. The 11 HIED programs with a specified dissertation focus for the Ph.D. invoked terms such as: *research; original knowledge, contribution, or scholarship*. One program

indicated that, for the Ph.D., the dissertation committee could change the focus—presumably from research- to practice-based.

Based on the advertised focus for each degree, one might expect fewer minimum credit hours for a problem- or practitioner-based dissertation—as compared to a study based on original research. Table 4 shows that, on average, the Ph.D. included approximately 3-5 credit hours beyond those for the Ed.D. Despite this finding, five of the programs listed the same dissertation credit hours for both degrees, and three others did not specify the credits for the Ed.D. and/or Ph.D. One program indicated variable dissertation credit hours for each degree, with an average of 10 credit hours for the Ed.D. and 18 for the Ph.D.

Table 4

Research Component Requirements

	Ed.D	Ph.D.
Minimum dissertation credit hours ^a		
Group mean (low end)	12.44	15.44
Group mean (high end)	13.78	18.56
Group range	3-24	4-32
Research tool credit hours ^b		
Group mean (low end)	10.25	15.25
Group mean (high end)	10.75	15.83
Group range	6-22	6-26

^aThree HIED programs did not specify a set number of dissertation credit hours. The data shown are based on the remaining nine programs. One of these nine programs used variable credit hours for each degree. This variability is reflected in the low- and high-end calculations. ^bTwo HIED programs used variable credit hours for each degree. This variability is reflected in the low- and high-end calculations shown above. Another HIED program listed number of units, in lieu of credit hours. The researchers assumed 3 credit hours for each unit.

The programmatic focus of and minimum credit hours for a dissertation relate closely to doctoral

research tools—those quantitative and qualitative courses that equip students to conduct scholarly inquiry. The data in Table 4 reflect that, on average, approximately 5 more credit hours were required in this area for the Ph.D. than the Ed.D. Only two HIED programs required the same credit hours for both degrees, two units (assumed to be a total of 6 credit hours) in one case and 12 credit hours of research tools for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in the other.

Within the remaining 10 HIED programs, the Ph.D. always involved more research tool credit hours than the Ed.D., but this requirement varied greatly. The most extreme example involved a program that required 10 extra credit hours for the Ph.D. whereas two other programs mandated 9 additional credit hours for the same degree. At the opposite end of the spectrum, three programs required only an extra 3 credit hours beyond those for the Ed.D. In one other instance, Ph.D. students had to complete 16 credit hours, twice the amount required of their Ed.D. counterparts. In fulfilling this requirement, Ph.D. students also had to attain proficiency in at least one of four specific research methodologies.

Discussion

The methodology for this study permitted a detailed analysis of HIED program data for the Ed.D. and Ph.D. at 12 institutions. This analysis suggested that the curricular convergence cited by Richardson and Walsh (1978) has continued—and accelerated—over the ensuing 30+ years. Even though these 12 programs advertised the “practitioner- versus research-oriented” dichotomy, the degrees mirrored each other more than they differed. Beyond this advertised dichotomy, differentiation was limited to modest differences in total hours for the respective degrees and in credit hours for research tools and dissertations. These factors suggest that a key difference between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. in HIED programs may only be rhetorical (i.e., HIED programs subscribe to the traditional rhetoric of *practitioner vs. researcher*, but their actual implementation may not strictly align with these distinctions).

Interestingly, another form of differentiation appeared across student selectivity and productivity. Occurring sporadically, this subtle differentiation resulted in Ph.D. students being held to more rigorous standards in total credit hours, or admissions requirements, or residency scheduling. In a few instances, this extra rigor was counterbalanced by perquisites for Ph.D. students, such as special attention from an advisor when selecting courses or mentored teaching and research opportunities. Similar examples of these one-on-one working relationships with faculty members were not mentioned for Ed.D. students.

Although minor in scope, the subtlety of this differentiation suggests that another difference between an Ed.D. and Ph.D. may also be, as Richardson and Walsh (1978) mentioned, at least as philosophical as curricular. By offering both degrees, Colleges of Education can maximize potential enrollments and, with the Ed.D., attract hard-working professionals who want to pursue a doctorate, but can only do so on a part-time basis. The Ph.D. serves as the test bed for future faculty members and researchers and affords faculty greater opportunities to work with and mentor exceptional students bent on an academic career.

Whatever the justification for two HIED doctorates at a single institution or within the field of study, the time for such rationalization may have passed. Conditions confronting American higher education have changed radically over the past 30 years. As the current economic crisis forces institutions to cut back, it may prompt them to do what they have heretofore avoided (Schrecker, 2010) and force program closures. Indeed, in a period marked by steep tuition hikes, sweeping enrollment cuts, faculty and staff

salary freezes or furloughs, and drastic reductions in academic programs and class offerings nationwide, it is unlikely that higher education administrators, regents, legislators, or government officials will view sympathetically any arguments about the relative benefits of maintaining two HIED doctorates.

Whether based on rhetorical, philosophical, or curricular concerns, the lack of differentiation between the Ed.D. and Ph.D. could garner external attention and pressure to close apparently “duplicative” programs. In light of this probability, the researchers feel compelled to offer recommendations that may prove valuable to program coordinators and faculty members interested in preserving HIED programs and protecting or ensuring their continuing vitality. The recommendations that follow are offered to promote further inquiry and professional discussion in the current economic climate and should not be considered an indictment of extant Ed.D. and Ph.D. curricula.

The first recommendation involves institutions that now offer both degrees and may soon be called upon to defend them to external constituents. These HIED programs should undergo some serious introspection around and beyond the “practitioner versus researcher” dichotomy to examine the purpose of each degree. As a minimum, program coordinators and faculty members should ask themselves what they want each degree to accomplish and whether the respective degrees are *really* structured to produce those outcomes. Only by reviewing the desired purpose of each degree, and the alignment of its components toward that end, can HIED programs determine the appropriate level of differentiation. Further, this analysis and related productivity data may help departments determine, should the need arise, which program may be ceded or how programs may be merged.

A second recommendation for institutions would be a longitudinal transcript analysis—with follow-on alumni survey of graduates—to determine how well the chosen program has served them in their practitioner- or research-based HIED careers. Undergraduate academic programs often engage in this type of activity, and HIED programs could benefit from capturing such information from graduates and analyzing it to better understand what Ed.D. or Ph.D. coursework and related activities have and have not worked well. A similar analysis of dissertations, perhaps on the model followed by Coorough and Nelson (1991), could illuminate the extent to which the dissertation experience achieved its intended purpose.

A third recommendation involves the HIED scholarly organizations, which could take the lead and help member institutions clarify and resolve concerns surrounding the two doctorates. Initiatives might include a national dialogue on definitional issues, research exploring various entry, course, and research components, a compendium of best practices employed by different types of institutions, and an effort to reach agreement about appropriate minimal standards for various degree components. These organizations also might attempt to develop a consensus around which type of degree best serves the profession. Besides offering countless follow-on research opportunities, this consensus could bring greater respect for and understanding of the many doctoral programs that are responsible for training tomorrow’s college and university administrators, faculty members, and researchers.

Closely related to this recommendation is the in-depth review of other HIED programs. As mentioned earlier, the ASHE database (2008) listed approximately 168 institutions offering either the Ed.D. or the Ph.D. in HIED—but not both. Many of these programs are located at some of the nation’s most prestigious universities, which prompts several questions worthy of further investigation. For example, what reasons (e.g., administrative costs, student demand, faculty expertise, etc.) led these institutions

to offer only one doctorate in the HIED field of study? What impact has this decision had on enrollments? What is the advertised focus of the degree being offered? How well does the program achieve it?

American higher education has been thrust into a set of circumstances unlike it has ever confronted before, one where business as usual is no longer possible or tolerated. For HIED as a field of study, this period will offer many opportunities for future research. However, for the present, it is likely to pose threats to HIED programs and necessitate the resolution of long-standing quandaries whether the profession is ready or not.

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*Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Texas A&M University-Commerce, PO Box 3011, Commerce, TX 75429-3011. Telephone: (903) 886-5083; Fax: (903) 886-5507; E-mail: Jay_Leist@tamu-commerce.edu

**Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Texas A&M University-Commerce, PO Box 3011, Commerce, TX 75429-3011. Telephone: (903) 886-5503; Fax: (903) 886-5507; E-mail: Joyce_Scott@tamu-commerce.edu

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