Part 1: Designing the Doctorate

Part 1: Designing the Doctorate: Introduction

Patrick Alan Danaher

A key element of traversing the doctorate is the successful design of doctoral programs, which is as complex as it is crucial, encompassing a broad range of essential building blocks. While each of these building blocks can be seen as a pre-requisite of designing the doctorate for effectiveness and sustainability, each building block is envisioned, enacted and evaluated in widely varying conditions and contexts, and with different purposes and effects. Furthermore, doctoral program design reflects the influence, and is intended to fulfil the requirements, of disparate disciplines and divergent program types, including diverse approaches to research training and assessment of learning outcomes. This is the focus in the five chapters in this first part of the book.

In Chapter 2, Guillermo Bautista Pérez and Anna Escofet proffer a conceptual review of the competencies – related specifically to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – needed for successful doctoral study and supervision. Arguing strongly for the acquisition of digital competence in doctoral programs, the authors elicit five dimensions of such programs that can be enhanced significantly by ICT integration. The chapter includes a set of digital competence resources and strategies that will assist doctoral students and supervisors alike.

Cristy Bartlett and Douglas Eacersall use Chapter 3 to examine the crucial but sometimes contested doctoral program building block related to confirmation of candidature. Deploying autoethnographic reflections gleaned from their separate and shared experiences as doctoral students and research administrators, the authors thereby synthesise experientially powerful insights with broader lessons gleaned from the relevant scholarly literature. The chapter also presents useful strategies for doctoral students traversing the confirmation of candidature, clustered around writing the proposal, delivering the oral presentation and engaging with the panel's written feedback.

The emphasis shifts in Chapter 4, written by Mark Emmerson, to the vital project of encouraging a culture of successful doctoral student completions through a focus on how universities communicate with their doctoral students. The author draws on his previous role as a research administrator to contend that effective institutional communication can ameliorate such commonly experienced obstacles as crises in competence and the imposter syndrome. The chapter exemplifies a powerful argument for communication with doctoral students as an empowering and unifying practice.

In Chapter 5, Maria Cerrato-Lara, Montserrat Castelló Badia and Kirsti Lonka demonstrate the analytical utility of using questionnaires and scales to study doctoral programs from the students' perspectives. The authors present selected findings from a review of 53 empirical studies investigating those perspectives that were published between 1991 and 2019. The chapter elaborates the major themes from these studies, as well as identified gaps and suggestions for future research in this field.

Finally in this first section of the book, Jay Somasundaram and Prue Howard explore in Chapter 6 the implications of two sets of provocative comparisons: between undergraduate degrees and doctoral programs; and between education and engineering. The first-named author's experiences as a doctoral candidate help to ground the discussion of these comparisons. Employing institutional logics to frame their comparative case study, the authors use their findings as a springboard to pose unfamiliar but important questions about different approaches to designing highways for doctoral students to traverse.