

Promovieren in den USA

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History

When at the turn of the 21st century, German educational policy makers and German universities look at US doctoral education, particularly at the American Graduate School, as a model for renewal of the German doctorate, it is as if history reversed itself. A little over a hundred years ago, in the late 19th century, leading US college educators turned to the German university as a model for inspiration to reform the inherited British undergraduate college into a place for advanced learning and training in original research. Then, as now, both sides borrowed selectively and reworked the ideas to fit their countries' needs and ideas of the time. The results become new creations with only little resemblance of the original inspiration. In the US the degree served almost exclusively as the gateway into the professoriat; whereas in Germany it was chiefly a ticket into the civil service or secondary school teaching. Therefore, in American universities the PhD from the beginning entailed in most cases more substantial research than in Germany. Most strikingly the US version concocted a novelty never imagined in Germany: the distinction between undergraduate and graduate study.¹ At the individual discipline level, the undergraduate and graduate education is housed under one roof, the American department. As a way to coordinate the various graduate programs, American universities from the beginning established the graduate school, a central administrative unit that oversees all of master's, doctoral education, and recently post-doctoral training on a campus.²

In the following I will first contextualize the structure and functioning of US PhD education with basic data on PhD production, second explain the educational program process as experienced by a doctoral student, third depict the organizational home of the doctoral program, the department, fourth, explain the role and function of the US graduate school and its leader the graduate dean, and end with an analysis of the strength and weakness of the US doctoral education.

Development and Scope of the US PhD Education

¹ James Turner and Paul Bernard., "The German Model and the Graduate School. The University of Michigan and the Origin Myth of the American University," in Roger Geiger (ed) The American College in the 19th Century, Vanderbilt University Press, 2000

² see John Hopkins, 1870 (check)

After completing an undergraduate degree, which is generally a four-year course of study, an individual is qualified to apply to further education at the graduate level. If a person chooses to go on for a doctorate degree the options varies from program to program. For some programs the procedure is to obtain a master's degree and then apply to continue on for the doctorate. Other programs allow the applicant to apply directly to a doctoral degree program. While great variety exists among doctoral programs, two basic structures are common. One pertains primarily to social science and humanities fields, the other to science and engineering. Both general types of programs have a highly selective admissions process. In general, a quarter of all applicants are admitted. The more selective a doctoral program, the smaller the percentage of admitted applicants.

Admission criteria are based on the undergraduate grade point average, the scores on a national graduate entrance exam, which includes a verbal, analytical, and quantitative component, letters of recommendation from undergraduate professors, and a "Statement of Purpose" essay. For the social science and humanities the typical program involves up to three years of course work—mainly seminars. Many doctorate programs require a certain number of fixed core courses along with a fairly large number of electives. The end of this period is marked by general exams or a major publishable essay, which serve to demonstrate the knowledge of the field acquired during the course work years. Usually after the passing of the exam or the essay, students embark upon developing their dissertation proposal. This proposal is formally reviewed. Thereafter students are engaged in their original research. This period of time needn't take place at the home university, but often is spent in the field, archives, museums, libraries anywhere in the world. The completion of the dissertation is in most instances a formal presentation by the student to the dissertation committee, which consists of between 3-5 faculty members, with one person who must be from outside the program. At present the average time-to-degree in the social sciences and humanities ranges between 5-8 years for social sciences and 5-9 years in the humanities.

Science and engineering doctorates follow a similar sequence of course work, dissertation development and research. However an essential preliminary step is an exam at the end of the first year of doctoral study in which the students have to demonstrate basic advanced knowledge of the field. In many programs this exam functions as a way to ensure that only qualified students continue. At the end of year two or in some cases year three students take a general exam that entails the presentation of the dissertation proposal and a publishable research paper. During the entire period of doctoral study, the students work in their main dissertation advisor's laboratory, usually paid as research assistants. Given that in these laboratories major research is taking place, doctoral students work side-by-side with their advisor, the advisor's post-docs, and undergraduate students on research that is likely to shape their dissertation. Completion of the dissertation culminates in a defense, usually at the end of year five and up to year seven. One significant distinction between the fields of study is the nature of their financial support. Social science and humanities students rarely have the opportunity to be paid to work on their dissertation. Instead they are often employed as teaching assistants. However, this employment is, in most cases, not directly related to their dissertation. In many science fields a post-doc (between two and four years) has become a requirement to enter a professorial career path.

In the US the doctorate in law and medicine are not research doctorates and are not included in the discussion of or statistical data on PhD education.

Approximately 4% of all undergraduates in the US go on to obtain a doctorate. Presently over 40,000 PhDs are awarded annually in the US from 406 institutions. Doctoral education is concentrated in over 50 institutions, largely in the major research universities that are member of the American Association of Universities. Recent increases in PhD production occurred in the biological sciences, physical sciences, and engineering, largely due to the influx of international students. Women's participation in the doctoral education has steadily increased since WWII. Women's PhD acquisition surpassed men in education, the social sciences, since 2000 is equal to that of men in the humanities. While the vast majority of doctorate recipients are racially identified as white, the year 2000 saw the largest percentage yet of doctorates being earned by individuals identified as racial/ethnic minority in the US. Almost 30% (11,597) of all doctorates were earned by non-US citizens, coming from China, Korea, and India. **(CHECK 2001)** In the US the median age of those individuals receiving their doctorate in science and engineering fields is the early 30s, while for those in the humanities the median age is closer the mid 30s. Regardless of age and other employment status, in the US all individuals enrolled in graduate education have a student status within the university, even if they are also employed by the university as teaching or research assistants.

The Department, Home of the Graduate Program

The graduate faculty is faculty who likely teach both undergraduate and graduate classes. For graduate education (both master's and doctoral) a faculty member serves as director of graduate education, generally for two to four years. This position oversees the many issues facing graduate students, such as admission decisions, allocation of fellowships and assistantships, awards for exceptional graduate student teaching, initiation of program revisions and the overall monitoring of student progress, and appointment of graduate faculty to student committees. This position is significantly made easier by the presence of a full-time graduate administrative staff. Unlike the director, the graduate administrative staff is a permanent position that is able to offer continuity to the program as a whole and to the graduate students.

Departments are subject to periodic review, generally every ten years. This review covers both undergraduate and graduate programs and its procedure varies among universities. The graduate component of these department reviews, which are undertaken by neighboring departments from the same university and faculty from the same discipline from other universities, consists of a qualitative and a quantitative assessment of the master's and doctoral programs. Usually the departmental review is part of the responsibility of the Graduate School, undertaken by the Graduate Council—an academic senate sub-committee.

In addition each faculty is annually reviewed by the department chair for purpose of promotion. This promotion review includes an assessment of publications, teaching evaluations, and in many cases doctoral satisfaction with received advising. It also includes doctoral students academic achievement and honors, assistance to graduate students in their professional development, such as publishing, teaching, grant writing, and presentation skills at national and international conferences.

The US Graduate School and Graduate Dean: the locus of and advocate for graduate matters within US universities

The graduate school is closely linked to the research agenda of the university. Universities vary in how they ensure that policies and procedures that govern the research activities of the university are directly responsive to the needs of the graduate programs. In some instances the positions of Vice-president for Research and the Graduate Dean are shared by the same person. In other cases, particularly where large medical schools exists, these two positions are filled by two different people. Regardless the Graduate Dean and the Vice-president for Research are in the inner circle of the President of the university.³

It is through the Graduate School that student progress is monitored, degrees are granted, dissertations collected, and new degree programs are approved.

A graduate dean can count on a national, regional, and statewide support structure. On the national level the Council of Graduate Deans (CGS) represents graduate education concerns at the federal level and updates graduate deans on national issues, such as legal requirements for international students and federal graduate fellowship support. CGS also provides support to newly appointed graduate deans in the form of a week-long summer institute, which covers crucial topics for the deanship.

On the regional level several states within on region (for example all western US states) have annual meetings for graduate deans and their key staff. Within a state graduate deans meet several times a year to exchange and coordinate information and concerted actions *vis a vis* the state.

There are a number of roles the Graduate School plays on a campus. While it is difficult to rank their importance, quality control, advocacy for graduate education and students, the dissemination of essential information to departments, students, and applicants, and soliciting funds for graduate students re among the most important jobs carried out by the Graduate School.

Quality involves setting policies that define excellence in student selection, high quality in curriculum and dissertation standards that is consistent across all graduate programs, monitoring student progress, and establishing “best practices” in graduate programs, such as Teaching Assistant training. Advocacy involves serving as a voice for students in any

³ See Organizational Charts.

matter relating to education (including mediating grievances) and research, particularly in terms of the allocation of funding *vis a vis* the top administration.

Dissemination involves creating and maintaining a handbook on all the responsibilities, obligations, procedures, and opportunities for graduate faculty advisors and graduate students. In addition the Graduate School disseminates semester newsletters for students, annual reports to the other graduate deans and university administrators, recruitment brochures, and online statistical information. It also involves undertaking data collection and providing analysis and benchmark information on issues related to doctoral and post-doctoral education to the university community and other graduate deans.

The Graduate School plays a significant mediator and facilitator role between the various departments and provides professional development workshops for faculty and students. As such it functions to provide hands-on skills for grant writing, publishing, applying for jobs, public presentations, and faculty advising. The Graduate School also is a catalyst for innovation in graduate education, such as advancing new interdisciplinary programs.

An important of the Graduate School is to assure a diverse student body in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and citizenship.

The Graduate School also works closely the various student service units on campus, such as student housing, financial aid, counseling, career placement, international office, disability student office, and the women's center to make sure that these services are readily available to graduate students.

In terms of the governing university bodies, the Graduate School communicates regularly with the official student representative body through 1-3 designated representatives.

One of the most important roles of the Graduate School is to facilitate the overall intellectual community by sponsoring symposia, guest lectures, and seminars.

Strength, weakness of the US doctoral education

The US doctoral education benefits from its infrastructure (the Graduate Schools) that covers everything from policy and procedures to financial support and mechanisms for quality assurance. The various evaluations carried out by graduate schools and other national organizations, such as the National Research Council and, professional accreditation organizations, maintain a high quality of doctoral education and are a guarantor of ongoing systemic renewal.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of doctoral education in the US is through the existence of the Graduate School the student experience and intellectual development is valued and fostered. Faculty supported in their roles as advisors. Attention to student retention, time-to degree, career development, and doctoral job placement.

Weakness of US doctoral education include that isolation can occur following the completion of course work, particularly for social science and humanities students. Because of the department structure developing interdisciplinary doctoral programs is often cumbersome. Finally, differential support mechanisms among the disciplines results in long time to degree, particularly in the social science and humanities fields.