

U.S. Initiatives to Improve Doctoral Education

Re-envisioning the Ph.D. – University of Washington—2000-2003

(<http://www.grad.washington.edu/envision/about/index/html>) Although the project ended, the Website is still active and all of the project materials are available.

“**Re-envisioning the Ph.D.** was a \$515,000 project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts which posed the challenging question: “How can we re-envision the Ph.D. to meet the needs of the society of the 21st Century?” The Project was funded to:

- Identify and produce examples of the scattered and diffuse attempts currently underway to redesign doctoral education;
- Explore the connections among the efforts, the issues, and the many stakeholders involved;
- Convene national leaders to develop a set of strategies and incentives and an overall concept or design for addressing the issues to effect change based on a new vision of the Ph.D.
- Continue to encourage and support national conversations and serve as a clearinghouse of innovative practices in doctoral education.

Thus the mission was to foster local and national/international discussions and initiatives that address the question: How can we re-envision the Ph.D. to meet the societal needs of the 21st Century?”

Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate

(www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/index.asp?key=29).

“The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) was a five year action and research project that worked with doctoral-granting departments committed to restructuring their programs to better prepare graduates. Six disciplines were included: chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics and neuroscience.” The project produced the following best practice publication:

The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century (2008)

George Walker, Chris M. Golde, Laura Jones, Andrea Conklin Bueschel, Pat Hutchings

Publisher: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Abstract:

This groundbreaking book explores the current state of doctoral education in the United States and offers a plan for increasing the effectiveness of doctoral education. Programs must grapple with questions of purpose. The authors examine practices and elements of doctoral programs and show how they can be made more powerful by relying on principles of progressive development, integration, and collaboration. They challenge the traditional apprenticeship model and offer an alternative in which students learn while apprenticing with several faculty members. The authors persuasively argue that creating intellectual community is essential for high-quality graduate education in every department. Knowledge-centered, multigenerational communities foster the development of new ideas and encourage intellectual risk taking.

The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation “The Responsive Ph.D.: Innovations in U.S. Doctoral Education.”

The report can be downloaded at [http://www.woodrow.org/images/pdf/resphd/ ResponsivePhd_overview.pdf](http://www.woodrow.org/images/pdf/resphd/ResponsivePhd_overview.pdf).

The preface explains the purpose: “To maintain Woodrow Wilson’s prejudice for action, this report is meant to be especially direct and useable. Like the overarching initiative it reflects, it has four themes, distilled from our reading of the various research reports on the state of the doctorate.

The first theme, **new paradigms**, evolved out of a rebellion among participants against the scholarship-as-enemy implication of some of the previous studies. Scholarship, we said, is the heart of the doctorate. We should never apologize for pushing back the night. In fact, to argue that research is too much the focus of the doctorate ironically lets

scholarly practice off the hook. We wanted to center the question, *What encourages or discourages truly adventurous scholarship?*

New practices asks: By what means can we make all aspects of doctoral training, including pedagogy, truly developmental? How do we evolve from the habit of assigning our least-experienced teachers to our least-experienced students in courses the faculty has decided not to engage? But the notion of new practices also involves a revolution in the concept of service, as it seeks ways to make *the application of knowledge* beyond the academy integral to a doctoral experience.

New people concerns the challenge of enlisting the entire U.S. population, including currently meagerly represented groups, in the doctoral demographic. Beyond funding, is there a way to make the sense of the doctorate more socially responsive and less abstract, white, irrelevant?

New partnerships seeks an essential and continuous relationship between those who create the doctoral process and all those who employ its graduates. Structured around these themes, this report on the Responsive Ph.D. offers a small number of recommendations, a range of means for acting on each, and some examples from the participating universities. Together, these institutions have created more than forty innovations that demonstrate the four themes.

Council of Graduate Schools Ph.D. Completion Project

(<http://www.phdcompletion.org>.) The following is a summary of the project taken from the CGS Web site.

Attrition in U.S. doctoral programs is a tremendous waste of America's financial resources and human energies. Increasing demand for workers with advanced training at the graduate level, an inadequate domestic talent pool, and a small representation of women and minority graduates at all education levels are among some growing concerns over workforce issues that relate to the vitality and competitiveness of the U.S. economy. Improving completion rates for all doctoral students, and particularly for those from underrepresented groups, is vital to meeting our nation's present and future workforce needs.

The Ph.D. Completion Project is a seven-year, grant-funded project that addresses the issues surrounding Ph.D. completion and attrition. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), with generous support from Pfizer Inc and the Ford Foundation, has provided funding in two phases to 29 major U.S. and Canadian research universities to create intervention strategies and pilot projects, and to evaluate the impact of these projects on doctoral completion rates and attrition patterns. An additional 15 partner universities are currently participating in various aspects of this project. The Ph.D. Completion Project aims to produce the most comprehensive and useful data on attrition from doctoral study and completion of Ph.D. programs yet available.

Previous studies suggest that under highly favorable conditions, no more than three-quarters of students who enter doctoral programs complete their degrees. Research has also shown that the vast majority of students who enter doctoral programs, have the academic ability to complete the degree. Six institutional and program characteristics emerge, however, as key factors influencing student outcomes that can ultimately affect the likelihood that a particular student will complete a Ph.D. program: selection, financial support, program environment, research mode of the field, processes and procedures.

The projects supported by the Pfizer and Ford Foundation grants test interventions in these 6 areas and have identified additional areas in which innovative practices contribute to increased doctoral degree completion. Graduate deans from participating institutions will highlight their "best practices" in national and institution-wide discussions on the topic of Ph.D. completion.

More information about the Ph.D. Completion Project is available on the [project website](#).

Sloan Foundation, Making the Implicit Explicit (Book by the same title by Barbara Lovitts, published in 2007 by Stylus/Sterling, VA.

This book explored the basics of a good dissertation in ten fields: biology, physics, electrical engineering/computer science, mathematics, economics, psychology, sociology, English, history, and philosophy. Through focus groups of faculty members on ten campuses, the author identified the overarching and unique qualities of dissertations in an effort to better prepare

students to write a successful dissertation and faculty to direct one. It identifies the learning goals of the dissertation and concludes that the purpose of a dissertation and doctoral education is essentially the same as it was when the first doctorates were awarded in the U.S.: to produce scholars who are capable of conducting independent original research or research that makes a significant contribution to knowledge. The dissertation should “reflect the training received, the technical skills, and the analytic and writing abilities developed in a doctoral program.”