INTRODUCTION

As credentialing and certification become more important in almost every career path in the American workforce there has been increased emphasis on the delivery of, and success rates in, higher education. For many institutions this has proven to be a valuable shift that continues to drive an increasingly diverse student population and motivates high growth in nontraditional student enrollment. Combined with formal education is the increasing emphasis on obtaining professional certifications and pursuing continuing professional development.

Some of this is being seen among the professoriate, particularly in required professional development work and the award of certificates for completed courses of professional development. The issue of actual credentialing beyond the doctorate, however, is one that continues to be absent in American higher education. While there is perhaps an argument that tenure has traditionally served this purpose the declining use of the tenure process in many institutions leaves a gap in recognition.

Perhaps the most formal example is the practice of habilitation. “The habilitation, which is normally a single-authored monograph, is the most important academic qualification in the German system” (Muller-Camen & Salzbgeber, 2005, p 280). In addition to the monograph professors also present a public lecture and discussion as well as compile a documented history of lecturing at a university (PhD and Postdoc). Following the completion of habilitation faculty members not only hold the title and recognition of advanced standing beyond the holder of a doctorate but this is also usually a requirement for serving on dissertation committees. This process closely mirrors the traditional tenure process in American universities, but the declining use of tenure in many institutions leaves a gap in recognition.

The other most frequently seen approach is that of the earned, rather than honorary, higher doctorate. Usually seen in Great Britain and other countries following the British educational model like Australia and New Zealand, although present in other places, this is a similar...
process to habilitation but without the connection to doc- 
toral teaching qualifications. While specific practices vary 
among institutions the general approach and qualification 
process is very similar. 
The higher doctorate, which may be awarded in any num-
ber of different disciplines, is designed as a mechanism by 
which accomplished faculty members can be recognized 
for their success in scholarship. As defined by The Quality 
Higher doctorates may be awarded in recognition of 
a substantial body of original research under-
taken over the course of many years. Typically a 
portfolio of published work which has been pre-
viously published in a peer-reviewed context is 
submitted for assessment. Most higher education 
awarding bodies restrict candidacy to graduates or 
academic staff of several years’ standing (p.23).

Primarily, the higher doctorates are based on contribu-
tions to scholarship, most frequently demonstrated by 
published research. Candidates assemble a portfolio of 
published work, often but not always with a synthesis 
piece explaining the path of the candidate’s inquiries, 
and submit the complete collection to a review commit-
tee at the university. The committee reviews the work 
and makes a decision on whether or not the candidate’s 
portfolio justifies the award of the degree. If a portfolio is 
declined there are varying policies about when or if a 
candidate may reapply for recognition.

DOMESTIC BENCHMARKING

While there are excellent models available internation-
ally there are also valuable assessment models in use in 
the United States. Challenges, because are seen in accredita-
tion organizations rather than individual recognition 
programs. As one example the Accreditation Council 
for Business Schools and Programs (AACSB) has a variety of 
accreditation standards for Business faculty as either aca-
demically or professionally qualified. These qualifications 
require certain academic credentials, but beyond that 
focus on a professor’s teaching skills and their contribu-
tions to scholarly research. The Association to Advance 
Collegiate Schools of Business (AACS) follows a similar model 
of faculty assessment.

While both of these accrediting models, as well as those 
used by regional accrediting agencies, review and recog-
nize accomplishments in their fields they lack any 
sort of lasting certification mechanism. Schools under re-
view for accreditation will receive the results of the faculty

assessments, but faculty members are not credited for 
any period of time as certified under a particular system 
nor does approval at one school during one accreditation 
review necessarily guarantee approval in another review 
later in their careers. The reform of accreditation stan-
dards is far beyond the scope of this discussion, but the 
lack of a permanent credential does raise the question of 
how faculty can be better recognized for progress and ac-
complishment in their career.

A THEORETICAL AMERICAN MODEL

As there is no standard higher doctorate process in place 
in the United States the professoriate has an opportunity 
to create one. While excellence in research is certainly a 
noble goal it seems like too narrow a category by which 
to measure a professor’s career. If, as a profession, the Ameri-
can professoriate values the multiple areas in which a pro-
fessor contributes to the intellectual life of the university 
then the qualification process should encompass excel-
ence beyond published work.

The primary challenge in designing such a program may be 
the definition of what accomplishments should look like. 
Much of the most important work that professors do is 
difficult to quantify and, by extension, is difficult to 
rank across candidates. This is ultimately not different 
from so much of what is done in academic settings every 
day. Thus, a qualitative assessment of candidate achieve-
ments will be at the core of the higher doctorate process.

Prior to the assessment will be a set of basic qualifying 
standards for applicants. Reasonably it takes time to build 
a portfolio of published work and a record of teaching and 
public service. With the time it takes to build a record 
may be linked to specific points of career advancement, such as 
promotion to associate professor or the award of tenure. 
There may also be other qualifying elements such as pos-
session of an earned terminal degree before the award of 
the higher doctorate. Once such threshold measures are 
established candidates meeting them can advance to the 
assessment phase.

The assessment will focus on identifying and reviewing 
candidate performance across a range of professional re-
 sponsibilities. These will include research as well as teach-
 ing, service to the institution, and service to the profession 
and/or community. Measures of success in these different 
areas of professional activity will differ, but a key to 
a comprehensive model will be the proper inclusion of all 
actors in the review.

Scholarly production may be the easiest element to evalu-
ate, although it is a substantial measure. A scholar-
ship’s output is a measurable product, specifically publi-
cations and presentations, the base measure for successful 
scholarship is relatively simple to quantify. Beyond this basic 
quantitative measure, however, there are many ques-
tions about how to gauge a scholar’s success. At the most 
basic level it would probably be acceptable to require all 
published work submitted for the award of a higher doc-
torate to be peer-reviewed. Beyond just the peer-review 
threshold is the question of the overall value of the 
work is judged.

If an applicant has a low overall production of scholarly 
publications but the majority of those publications are 
in the top journal in their field does that mean more, or as 
much, as another applicant who has a high volume of 
published work in lower tier journals or conference 
proceedings? This highlights the qualitative nature of the 
review process. There are different measures of scholarly 
productivity and it would ultimately be up to a university 
or the review committee to make decisions about how 
such things would be considered. At some research-
focused universities there is an unwritten rule that a publi-
cation in a top tier journal is required for tenure, and that 
could reasonably be carried forward to the higher doctor-
ate review. At other institutions with a greater focus on 
teaching a different measure of scholarship may be more 
appropriate. This institutional focus will also inform the 
emphasis placed on other elements of the assessment pro-
cess.

Teaching would be another of the three overall measures of 
candidate performance. More so than research this will be 
difficult to quantify and will be very much 
with a qualitative review of available evidence. Student evalua-
tions of a faculty member’s performance would certainly be 
one factor, but does not encompass everything about a 
person’s contribution to the teaching environment of a 
department. Other elements such as courses developed or 
redesigned, variety of courses taught, oversight of graduate 
teaching assistants, mentorship of other faculty, and other 
contributions to the delivery of material in a department 
could all be considered in evaluating a professor’s teaching 
ability. Again, different institutions would use and weight 
different measures of teaching in different ways based on their 
environment, but a wide variety of professional service in the 
realm of instruction should be considered when looking at 
a candidate’s overall quality.

The third and final broad category concerns professional 
service. This encompasses both service to the university 
and also service to the discipline. Various factors to con-
sider may include committee service, serving in leadership 
roles in professional organizations, consulting, and other 
work in the field. Specific measures would depend on the 
common practice of a particular academic discipline as well 
as what a particular institution requires for faculty service to 
committees and other activities.

At this point in the discussion the review process is begin-
ning to sound very similar to a tenure review, and that is 
a fair assessment of the process. What differentiates this 
from tenure is arguable but the potential place for such a 
system in the academy today is unfortunately quite clear. 
Across the United States tenured and tenure-track profes-
sorships are a decreasing percentage of the total profess-
oriate. Institutions are moving to have fewer tenur- 
track positions, are eliminating tenure altogether, or simply 
did not have tenure and as they grow are choosing not to 
adopt it. This fading of tenure in the academic system leaves a void 
for professional achievement that needs to be filled by a 
new credentialing process. The higher doctorate, as prac-
ticed in many other countries, can provide an answer that 
gives faculty the opportunity to have their body of work 
closely evaluated, measured, and if warranted, credentials them 
with a line on the vita and a different set of regalia that sets them apart from younger, less experi-
enced members of the academy.

CONCLUSION

In an academic environment of increasing complexity, 
dynamic competitive conditions, and more challenging 
work conditions faculty need a tenure for professional 
development and recognition. Zusman (2008) says of 
higher education in our century that “Changes both 
inside and outside the academy are altering its character 
— its students, faculty, governance, curriculum, functions, 
and very place in society” (p 5). Adopting a higher doc-
torate model would be one way to provide faculty mem-
bers with a template of professional accomplishment that 
leads to success. By measuring their efforts against a set 
review process they have the opportunity to more orderly 
and execute their own growth as scholars. Were these requirements to be public knowledge it would even give faculty the ability to look at other institutions and understand how they might fit, or how they may need to alter their professional pursuits to better match a desired future posi-
tion.

This proposal is one that raises more questions than it 
answers. In our current shifting academic marketplace, 
however, such discussions need to happen. To continue 
producing and mentoring successful scholars, and by ex-
tension to continue educating students and producing 
high quality graduates, recognition and re-
ward processes need to catch up with the market.
REFERENCES


