

Stepping to Center Stage: The Rise of Higher Education as a Field of Study

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Abstract

Higher Education as a Field of Study is multi-disciplinary in its origin. Given the relative youth of the field, as it was only founded less than 130 years ago, it does not yet have standalone theories or philosophies as the scholarship in the field frequently borrows from its epistemological, methodological, and philosophical ideas from more established social science disciplines and fields. The objective of this paper is to use an historical exploration of higher education in North America to articulate both higher education's foundation, purpose and philosophy. This analysis will aid in categorizing the types of questions the public and government ask of higher education and how higher education as a field of scholarship can impact the future of the governance, pedagogy, the nature of research, and university's societal role. The cumulative effect of this work is ultimately moving this field of study to the center stage of the discussions around higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, philosophy of education, foundation of education

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Introduction

Both the challenges and positive outcomes of higher education regularly make headlines across the country. Headlines such as racial tensions on campuses, the right to carry concealed weapons on campus, student debt, state funding cuts to higher education, campus sexual harassment, and university presidents forced out of their jobs are common stories featured in the news. In our current climate, what happens on university campuses can be big news pointing to national stories around campus freedom of speech, conflicts between liberal and conservative voices on campus, and faculty or administrators getting fired for comments they make in the news or social media.

At the same time, the benefits that Higher Education can bring to communities and the nation is also part of the national dialogue. For instance, recent reporting by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute brought attention to the fact that startup businesses from the University of California system generated some \$20 billion in economic activity for the state. Many of the recent advancements around cancer diagnosis and treatment have come from university-level research. There are also exciting advances around the microscopic world of nanotechnology and the large-scale engineering of internet infrastructures happening on university campuses across the country.

Both the challenges and positive outcomes of higher education support the need for a continued exploration of the empirical and qualitative realities that can express how universities function as enterprises of knowledge, artifact, technical, social/cultural, and leadership production. This work is best framed through faculty and graduate students who focus some or even all of their teaching, learning, and research to higher education as a field of study. This research path is also linked to ensuring infrastructures exist to disseminate and organize the knowledge that is generated. The current reality is that much of this work is being done by both graduate students and faculty who specialize in higher education as a field of study.

With the increasing scrutiny directed at universities around such matters as the value of the endeavor, accountability of public resources, and the liberalization of college campuses, there will be ongoing societal and economic interest in studying higher education. As a result of this, those involved in higher education inquiry and leadership will play a more significant role in answering the difficult questions posed of postsecondary institutions in our day. So that this discussion can be meaningful and purposeful, it is key to fully access the knowledge and research derived from higher education as a field of study within this

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growing narrative. The objective of this paper is to use an historical exploration of higher education in North America to articulate both higher education's purpose and philosophy of higher education as a field of study. This analysis will aid in categorizing the types of questions the public and government ask of higher education and how higher education as a field of scholarship can impact the future of the governance, pedagogy, the nature of research, and university's societal role. The cumulative effect of this work is ultimately moving this field of study to the center stage of the discussions around higher education.

Building the Plot

Academic explorations into the philosophy and purpose of a university are many and varied. Examples include Emberley (1996) who debated the current state of the financial, political, and spiritual collapse of universities through the contextual demands placed on the system by the cultural left and the corporate right. Clarifying the university's close relationship to its sociological and intellectual endeavors, Cabal (1993) took a more global perspective in his dialogue of the relevancy and quality of university education. From a more functionalist perspective, Minogue (1973) and Bok (1982) examined the usefulness that knowledge must serve as universities fulfill their external responsibilities to society. Switching focus to the internal responsibilities of universities, Barnett (1990) endeavored to develop a theory for higher education by studying the "fundamental principles on which the idea of higher education has traditionally stood, and the way in which those principles are being undermined" (p. 3).

There is also literature which connects the higher education narrative to key concepts or themes. They are the search for knowledge and truth (Leacock, 1934); the dissemination of knowledge from a master to a student (Brubacher, 1977); the need for internal autonomy (Pincoffs, 1972); the need for knowledge to serve a useful purpose (Jaspers, 1965); and the need for knowledge to be an end in itself (Newman, 1931; Newman, 1952). These concepts have not just risen in recent times but are instead founded on historical notions of what "higher" education should be and how it is different from primary forms of education.

Looking between the lines in these works, the writers were responding to the internal and external questions of their time about a university's connection to the past and how that could be hindering or helping higher education's progress in a modern era. The discussions were also a call for academic and public communities to bring back what once was. They were using higher education as a field of scholarship to express both the historical and future context of universities to the larger community of higher education stakeholders. After an extensive review of the higher

education literature, the authors of this article were able to classify the higher education narrative into four general constructs: the pedagogy of higher education, the concept and role of research in universities, university's connection and impact on society, and governance of higher education institutions. The discussion will now shift to explore how these overarching constructs have been shaped and influenced by a philosophical connection to the idea of a university.

Setting the Scene

The university as a modern institution did not begin to appear until the medieval ages due to a variety of internal and external educational needs (Southern, 1984). However, there is evidence that various forms of higher education were established on the continent of Africa as early as 331 AD (Chambers, 2017). Woldegiorgis and Doevenpeck, (2013) wrote in their historical reflection on Africa's contribution to the inception of the academy that,

Abjaji et al (1996), for example, have reported the existence of one such academy referred to as the Alexandrian Academy or the Universal Museum Library at Alexandria between 331 and 642 AD. It is also on record that in 859 AD, the Al-Quarawiyyin University was established at Fez in Morocco while the Al-Azhar University at Cairo was established in 970 AD in Egypt (Lulat, 2005). The 2,700 years old tradition of elite education of Ethiopia with an African script called Ge'ez could also be taken as an example of a higher form of education in pre-colonial Africa. (p. 35)

European countries such as England, Normandy, and Italy had an internal need for educated people who could assist in the growth of an expanding and developing nation, and there was also the external respect and recognition that came with being involved in the higher educational enterprise. University education was basically an individual contract established between the students and the master. The local town also benefited because the scholars and students needed to rent out apartments, spaces to study, and food to eat. This process developed into a mutual relationship between the town and the "university". This loose relationship between the students, masters, and the town leads historians to speculate that there was no specific administrative body for these early universities (Southern, 1984). The relationship between the masters, the students, and the local citizens was one of temporary need, so any type of administrative structure was most likely informal and indefinite.

As these higher scholastic endeavors increased in prominence, the crown saw higher education as a resource for a strong contingent of educated graduates whom it could use to support its growing national infrastructure. Evidence indicates that it was out of this need that

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the state first became involved in higher education. Similarly, during the medieval era, there had always been a strong connection between the church and learning and this relationship extended to the early universities. The rise of university institutions was also enhanced because the officials of both the church and the state needed a range of knowledge and skill in debate that was not being achieved in the grammar schools of the day. In this context, medieval universities were established under a close connection to both the state and the church with both institutions proposing external responsibilities on the results of higher education. The result was to create an educational climate that was ideal for higher learning and scholastic advancement. With these initial frameworks, there is evidence of a philosophy of higher education being formulated. It was to be a place of higher studies where the learning could be used to benefit society—especially the elite—and political designs. Even in higher education's early construction, there is evidence of pedagogical formations, a connection to society, and a rudimentary governance model.

Some of this advancement then lead to massive changes in the idea of a university during the Enlightenment. In its search for truth and scholastic advancement, the scientific research paradigm of the Enlightenment promised society “freedom, equality, justice, the good life, prosperity, health, stability, peace, higher standards of living, increased control over nature, society, and time, and the eradication of hunger, crime, and poverty” (Bloland, 1995, p. 523). A pretty tall order. One does not have to look very hard to see similar philosophical responsibilities within current university campuses. This is called progress and in modernist language, progress is defined as increasing control over nature and society (Giroux, 1988).

As part of this control, scientists relied on positivistic paradigms of inquiry, which, in turn affected their relationship to reality and truth (Locke, 2015; Wood, 2002). In this positivistic shift, subjects could be objectified, measured, quantified, and categorized. As Auguste Comte developed in his philosophies within “Course of Positive Philosophy”, the objects of science could be put into proper place and proper sequence through logical positivism. Drawing upon the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, whole new contexts of research were opened up as these researchers shifted their moral responsibilities to the discovery of universal laws (Wood, 2002).

As more scientists began to explore the boundaries of their moral and physical freedom, their scientific methodologies began to reveal truths, universalities, and laws about the universe and reality. Of fascination was that these truths existed in the universe. Truth and the laws of the universe were not something that had to be created; they were something that could be found and discovered (Comte, 1848). This process was expressed in enlightening findings like Newton's discovery of gravity, or

Darwin's "Origin of the Species". From this evolved one of the general assumptions of the Enlightenment: that truth is not created—it is discovered in the universe. Research activity that "stressed the search for general laws, formal and a priori hypotheses, neutrality with regard to moral issues, standardized assessment devices, the reduction of observed reality, and a distance between observer and observed" (Chesler, 1991, p. 79) became an essential element of knowledge creation in the idea of a university. Universities developed into privileged places where knowledge, truth, and expressions of culture became legitimized. For the first time in history, the university institution became a center where research was a primary focus. With a dynamic pedagogy in place, a more structured governance model, an increased awareness of a social role, and an articulation of research epistemologies, the university was functioning under a philosophical direction that has its footprint in our current higher education institutions.

As a counter narrative to the practical demands of the Industrial revolution, Cardinal John Newman was one of the founding philosophers of the liberal arts system of higher education (Newman, 1931; Newman, 1952). In his work, he called the academic community back to a higher education approach where the benefits to society were derived through pedagogies that formed and shaped the student as a learner and a thinker. He also espoused that research should also be involved in solving the cultural and societal challenges of the day and not be redirected by the boisterous economic agenda.

At this time, a bifurcation in the philosophies of higher education occurred and the scholarship of higher education grew to discuss these two different realities. There was a narrative around the market influence of higher education that served very practical and short-term needs. This was expressed vividly in research that was applied and attempted to meet the immediate needs of a growing industrial sector. Society also needed engineers, accountants, politicians, scientists, and doctors who could develop, support, and create this burgeoning society. The governance of universities strove to create infrastructures that supported a functionalist philosophy of higher education.

Conversely, Newman (1931 & 1952) believed that the study of knowledge should be its own end. The liberal arts educative process involved a Platonic form of philosophical discourse leading to knowledge. Newman believed that external agendas were altering the philosophical foundations of higher education and that the educational endeavor of the university should be to pursue knowledge free from political and economic agendas. In structuring the learning environment this way, Newman was striving to keep the demands of the industrial society distant from influencing university education and its traditional study. In

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fact, this pedagogical approach formed the ideology for many of the early universities throughout North America and especially in the mid-west (Nugent, 2015). There were many educational leaders and politicians who saw a different purpose for universities though. This alternative philosophical voice would speak its loudest following World War II. Although not formalized as it is today, this strategic change was an early expression of higher education as a field of study and scholarship.

In the 1940s, the United States was feeling the cultural, political, and social shock of having been involved in World War II. One of the greatest changes that would affect the idea of a university came because of World War II itself (Cardozier, 1993). For the first time, the United States had really seen the potential that research and science could have on the economy and on industry. Out of a practical need, the federal government had turned to research and science to produce all that was required for the war effort. The universities met the challenge with engineers, economists, chemists, biologists, political scientists, and physicists.

As a result of the successful relationship that had been established between the state and the universities during the war years, the federal government realized that it could use universities to educate and train returning veterans as part of their reintegration into North American society. Jaspers (1965) proposed that higher education should serve the individual while responding to national needs. His intention was that a balance needed to be struck between liberal notions where the search for knowledge was an end in itself and knowledge serving practical purposes. He believed this could be achieved by developing both liberal and professional pedagogies of learning.

Writers increasingly began to research the concept of learning in a university and from this five dominant pedagogies for university education began to develop in the scholarship around universities and learning: liberal-perennialism, progressivism, essentialism-behaviorism, humanism, and reconstructionism-critical theory (Barrow & Woods, 1975; Kneller, 1964; Langford, 1969; Scott et al., 1994).

Through liberal-perennialist philosophies—also known as mental discipline—the primary teaching practice was to discipline the mind or exercise it through the study of absolutes, often articulated in the form of principles. In this philosophy, the teacher was an intellectual expert and his or her primary teaching responsibility was to pass this knowledge to the students. For the students, learning was passive and was assessed through deductive, well-reasoned, and argued essays.

In progressivist philosophies, the learner continually interacted with his or her environment and attempted to interpret the meaning of his or her experiences. The role of the teacher was to become a partner or helper where the learner was the center of the learning process and

most learning occurred through reflections on their experiences and through problem solving.

In Essentialist-Behaviorist philosophies, the subject matter was most important with the teacher as the authority. The aim of education was to predict, change, and control students' actions by using available knowledge about the laws of human behavior. Through behaviorism, the teacher would elicit desired behaviors and then extinguish undesirable behavior. Skills were taught through an extrinsic reward and punishment system. Some examples of classroom teaching strategies were competency-based education, mastery learning, self-control, and assertiveness training. Assessment was based on demonstration of a changed behavior in accordance with predetermined behavioral objectives.

The teaching philosophy of humanism or self-actualization had responsibility to the individual as paramount. In turn, teaching strategies and methods evolving from this perspective aimed at promoting growth and self-actualization of the individual through positive relationships with the teacher. The educational tasks were to assist and recognize each person's individual potential, creativity, and freedom. Goals were achieved in community environments.

The aim of education in reconstructionism or critical theory was to create a new social order that would fulfill the basic values of our culture. Those basic values were to be founded on a genuine democracy whose major institutions and resources were controlled by the people themselves. Within this paradigm, the dynamics of power and empowerment were intrinsically intertwined. As such, student empowerment depended upon negotiating, not avoiding, the power dynamics. Critique became an essential practice and skill for the students to develop. In essence, critique calls for a special and suspicious interpretation of those ideologies and institutions that support and maintain ruling power structures. So as one critically reflects in dialogue with others and acts on that reflection, both personal and social transformation occurs. If one explores the questions in the literature and media about a university education, the discussion will most likely center on the weakness or credibility of these pedagogies. Awareness of these higher education philosophies brings meaning and purpose to the issues considered within higher education scholarship. At the same time, increased awareness of these pedagogies and more dynamic communication networks have expanded the mediums through which higher education as a field of study can impact higher educational change through its core pedagogies.

It is now important to concentrate on how studies and questions into higher education have influenced the governance of postsecondary institutions. In exploring the governance element, Canada is a great case in how governance aligned with the idea of what a university

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should be. Early Canadian university leaders struggled to define their philosophy and governance structures. Canada's early founding institutions developed in the late 1700s (Cameron, 1991). The structure of these colleges followed in line with the Oxford tradition in both its curriculum and in its theological support for the Church of England (Ontario Department of Education, 1896).

Samuel Baldwin's government was the first to propose a total break from religion in education and began to develop plans for a provincially-run, secular university (Wilson, 1933). This new university would offer an educational curriculum that prepared students for the practicalities of contributing to the economic and industrial growth of a young Canada. The Bill to create the University of Toronto was passed in 1849 (Cameron, 1991). It existed under the direct control of the province and was open to all people who desired to attend. As part of its establishment, the government passed an Act that bound the University of Toronto to the province. The Act of 1849 was "aimed at making the state university a common ground for the youth of the country irrespective of creed" (The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, p. xiii).

The Flavelle Royal Commission Report in 1906 (The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 1906) established an internal university environment that more closely matched the needs and concerns of the external Canadian environment. The Flavelle report strongly recommended that universities, as institutions of the state, be closely aligned with the needs of the larger Canadian community. Inherent in this governance shift was a philosophy around the social role of the university and how that social role requires a different governance model. To establish unity between the internal needs of the university and the external needs of the public, the university was to govern itself through a Board of Governors and a Senate called bi-cameral governance. The Board of Governors was to have the powers of the Crown vested in it, and the Senate was to direct the academic interests of the University. As such, the internal and external regulating structures of the bi-cameral system were to eliminate the university from being subjected to party politics and in so doing, provide an educative environment conducive to long-range stability. The intent of the "Flavelle Report" was to suggest that the bi-cameral approach would impart strength, continuity, and freedom of action to the governing bodies of the university while also keeping the university in touch with external public sentiment.

Educational philosophers such as W.E.B Du Bois and Benjamin E. Mayes in the mid and late 20th century advocated that the American higher education system also provided opportunities for social uplift and opportunities (Playfair, 2016; Warren, 2011; Gaines, 2012; Jelks, 2012). Colleges and universities have served as the laboratories for many of

the social moments in the United States and around the world. It can be said that the barometer of future social progress can be gauged and predicted based on social causes that are being fought and advocated for by students on college and university campuses.

One can look to the United States and recognize important governance moves through important frameworks such as land-grant universities and the Morrill Act, Historical Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU's), and Oberlin College. One thing is clear though in this governance discussion, the idea of a university is tied to a narrative around its teaching, research, service, and governance.

Why Higher Education as a Field of Study Got This Role

Higher education as a field of study links the concept of higher education to a science. The Science Council defined a “science” as “the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence” (Science Council, 2009). A scientific methodology is one that uses observation, data measurement, evidence, data benchmarks, critical analysis, repetition or transferability, and verification of the testing/analysis. This implies that, as represented in the definition, a science is driven by systematic practices that describe the processes for acquiring knowledge about that discipline. From there, a body of knowledge can be organized around that field of study based on what is derived from systematic practices. A concept that has been developed in this paper. The compilation of this knowledge can then lead to “theoretical and applied understanding of higher education institutions and systems and their interaction with an impact on society” (Hendrickson, 2013, p. 230). What this discussion suggests is that there are contemporary epistemologies and methodologies that are used in the study of higher education as researchers seek understanding around issues of pedagogy, research, governance, and higher education’s role in society. Many of the writers referenced in this paper are examples of higher education scholarship in its beginning forms to more complex current analysis. This includes research that is driven by a theoretical or philosophical debate to empirically-based hypotheses.

Higher Education Scholarship Prepares for the Stage

When compared to such ancient academic disciplines as medicine, mathematics, and history, the formal study of higher education using scientific principles is quite new. For the sake of this study we define a discipline as a broad area of knowledge that includes a common set

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of research problems, knowledge base, and set of commonly accepted research methods (Card, Chambers, & Freeman, 2016; Kuhn, 1962). Whereas a field is a smaller subset and more focused area of knowledge that specifically addresses problems within a discipline. For instance, medicine given this definition is a discipline, whereas veterinary medicine would be a field that is a subset of the broader/larger discipline of medicine. Higher Education as a Field of Study, according to Goodchild (1996), was first conceived in 1893, when the president of Massachusetts' Clark University, Granville Stanley Hall, provided a course on the problems of colleges and universities. This course was well-received by its students; and during the next several decades, Hall collaborated with others to produce courses with related content. Eventually, this work led to the organization of a Clark University graduate program in higher education.

Jensen (2013) documented the next steps of the emerging field of higher education, which began to develop in the 1930s. Soon after the establishment of the *Journal of Higher Education* in 1930, researchers began gathering data related to higher education concerns and problems. The data demonstrated the need for further research in this field—Master's theses and Doctoral dissertations had already been discussing higher education issues in quantity for the past decade.

Jensen (2013) reported that in the late 1930s, scholars began calling for increased research in the field of higher education, as opposed to “trial and error practices related to leadership and curriculum in higher education” (p. 2). Jensen (2013) also documented proposals for more course offerings in the area of higher education during this time period, as well as the increased attention such courses received in an attempt to market them toward aspiring professors.

Over the remainder of the twentieth century, Jensen (2013) wrote, higher education scholars began to draw attention to the growth of this new field. More publications appeared to expose higher education graduate programs and course offerings. While the research of the 1960s focused primarily on drawing attention to the existence of higher education programs, the research of the 1970s and 1980s began to explore some of the specific problems of the new field (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974; Fife & Goodchild, 1991). Soon, profiles of higher education professors and students appeared in the literature. By the 1990s and 2000s, research became targeted toward needs analysis of the field of administration and quality analysis of existing higher education programs.

Today, higher education programs are conceptualized differently than the 1930s model that emphasized teacher training. According to Altbach (2014), the growth of universities as institutions has resulted in changes to their authority structures. Modern universities are now

normally governed by full-time administrators, rather than professors who divide their time between the performance of administrative and teaching duties. This change in authority structure has necessarily resulted in a shift in the field of higher education toward the preparation of administrators and away from the preparation of professors.

Higher Education Modernizes its Part

According to Altbach (2014), American students of higher education today can expect to prepare themselves for careers as college and university administrators. Thus, in higher education programs across the country, coursework and training are more heavily emphasized than research. Students of higher education are typically instructed regarding the complexities of the institutions they hope to lead, learning of such practical topics as university history and finance (Freeman & Kochan, 2014).

Although the study of higher education is still considered an emerging field in the United States, in Europe it is even newer. According to Scott (as quoted in Kehm, 2015) the American and European models of higher education studies differ, perhaps in correspondence with cultural and political differences. Whereas the American discipline of higher education is an academic and practice-oriented one, focusing on (and researching) administration and leadership concerns, the European model is less of an academic discipline and more of a consultative approach, designed to assist policy-makers (2000). Scott's view of American higher education studies contrasts with that of Boston College's Philip Altbach (2014) and American professors Perucci and McManus (2012) who describe current American higher education studies as interdisciplinary, rather than an established, independent discipline.

Kienle and Loyd (2005) argued, however, that American institutions "can no longer exist in the ivory tower, or in the relative isolation of traditional American higher education" because of the increasingly global nature of higher education (p. 580). They also contended that higher education students—the future administrators of colleges and universities—should learn how to lead others toward intercultural effectiveness. Thus, it may be wise for students in the field of higher education to be aware of the various views of the field worldwide.

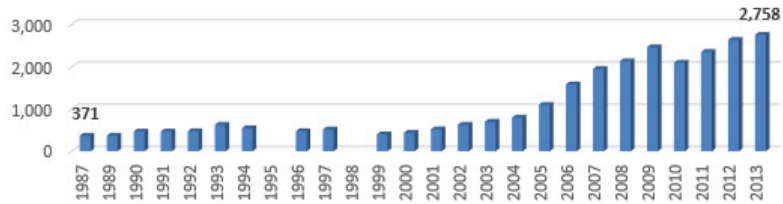
The Scholarship of Higher Education is Legitimized Through Education

From universities earliest inception during the medieval era, this article has described how religious leaders, academics, politicians, and others have thought about and asked questions of the higher education enterprise. Although higher education scholarship has been a necessity

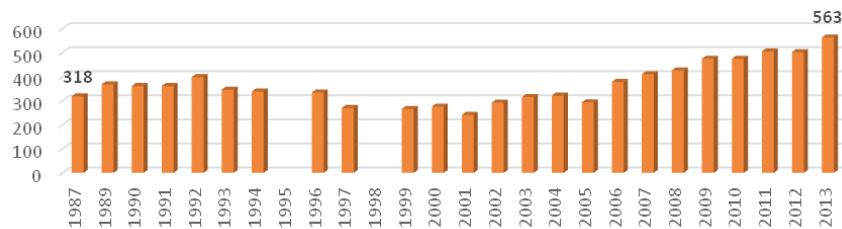
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since the inception of higher education in framing the narrative around the institution and what it is to be, only recently has higher education become a field of study in its own right. For instance in Canada, “Robin Harris was appointed the first professor of higher education in Canada in 1964” (Jones, 2012, p. 3). A similar history exists in the US where most doctoral programs in higher education date from the 1960s (Crosson & Nelson, 1986). In a study from 1974, Dressel and Mayhew found there to be 74 graduate programs in higher education. Currently, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) reports that there are over 260 higher education programs in the US. It is so widespread now that every state except one has at least one university offering a graduate program in Higher Education studies. This same growth in HE programs is happening with students who are interested in attaining their graduate degrees in higher education studies and research. The following data was derived from the Department of Education’s Digest of Educational Statistics.

Historical Record of Overall Graduate Education
Field of Higher Education 1987 - 2014 Masters
743% Growth



Historical Record of Overall Graduate Education
Field of Higher Education 1987 - 2014 Doctoral
177% Growth

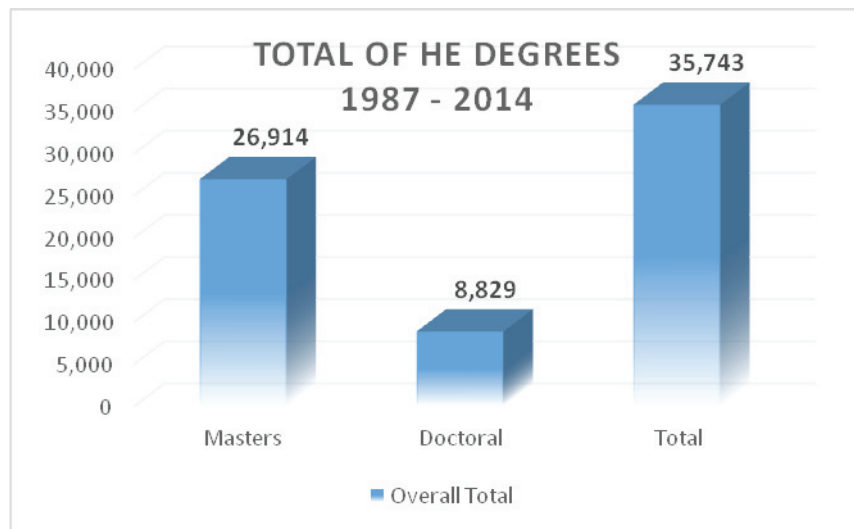


Historical Record of Overall Graduate Education
Field of Higher Education 1987 - 2014 Total
482% Growth



(Note that data was not available for the years 1995 and 1998.)

It is obvious by this data that there has been substantial growth in the number of degrees awarded in the field of higher education showing increased interest in the topic as a field of study. It also shows more and more academics want to contribute to the scholarship and practice of this field.



Over this date range, Higher Education programs have seen a mean percentage growth of 6% per year. This is compared with the field of

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Education in general which saw a mean percentage growth of 2.8% per year. When further compared to the field of education in general, there was a 199% increase in Masters degrees, a 167% increase in Doctoral degrees, and 196% increase in degrees overall from 1987 to 2014. Higher Education as a field of study saw increases of 743%, 177%, and 482% respectively which was greater growth in every category compared with the field of Education in general. Taking these numbers to a more overall level, Higher Education as a field of study saw higher rates of growth during this time period than all of graduate education combined. The total combined growth of all graduate education in all fields of study and with Masters and Doctoral studies was 279% compared with Higher Education as a field of study at 482%. Another indicator of growth in this field was that in 1987, HE degrees accounted for 0.2% of all graduate degrees awarded. In 2014, HE accounted for 0.36% of all graduate degrees awarded in the U.S.

While higher education leaders have historically acquired the skills and competencies requisite to their success through performing their duties (learning on the job), changes in the structure of the modern university have led to increasingly complex demands upon administrators. In response to these new demands that was presented in the data here, professionals in the field of higher education have developed broadly applicable graduate programs designed to train up the next generation of education administrators (Freeman, Chambers, & Newton, 2016).

Optimal graduate programs in higher education leadership, according to Freeman and Kochan (2012), are being designed to provide students with a grounding in higher education history, as well as in the practical considerations of institutional budgeting or finance. Additionally, these programs are preparing future administrators by allowing them to learn about the unique culture and context of higher education, where they will eventually become leaders. Finally, graduate programs in higher education are providing students with opportunities to cultivate a wide range of skills necessary to their success as administrators, including management, leadership, and communication skills. Stork, Grant, and Darmo (2015) reported that “The increase in generalist leadership programs has continued unabated” (p. 34). What is important is that these are all people who are practicing, thinking, and writing about higher education as a focus of their professional activities.

Student Affairs

A specialized niche within the field of higher education studies, graduate programs in student affairs leadership are designed to prepare students for highly specific careers in student affairs administration.

According to the American College Personnel Association (ACPA, 2016), there are now over 141 graduate programs at the Master's level in student affairs and higher education leadership.

According to the research of Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), graduate students in the field of student affairs and higher education leadership benefit most from programs that allow them ample opportunities to gain practical experience. In their words, "experiential learning [is] critical to future success" in this field; it "also allows students to observe multiple professional perspectives and widen the net of possible mentors as they transition into the field" (p. 329).

This is not to imply, of course, that future student affairs professionals cannot or do not benefit from actual course and program content. However, future student affairs professionals would likely be profited by an emphasis on how they can apply what they have learned to their future professions; this seems only appropriate for a degree program whose function it is to produce specialized professionals (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

Community College

In order to prepare the next generation of community college presidents and administrators, universities have recently begun offering specialized degrees and programs targeted toward future community college leaders (Forthun & Freeman, 2017a). According to Amey (2006), some of these programs are accredited graduate degrees, while others are offered as unaccredited professional development or career preparation courses.

However, Brown's (2001) research indicated that it is advisable for community college administrators to hold Doctorate degrees, preferably in the field of education leadership. Brown reported that "some leadership programs also develop a student's program of study around specific community college leadership goals, i.e., student development, instruction, finance, the presidency, technology, etc." (p. 150).

Interestingly, Hagedorn and Purnamasari (2014) wrote that community college leadership programs tend to attract graduate students of a closer match to community college student demographics than do other graduate programs; community college administrator programs are often populated by women and racial/ethnic minorities. Arguably, this graduate program demographic should help to produce strong role models for future community college students.

Internationalization

In an increasingly global society, the study of higher education leadership cannot be limited to American colleges and universities.

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Although higher education leadership itself is a relatively young field, it has already birthed several specialized sub-fields, including international higher education leadership. While international higher education leadership is not a common degree offering, institutions such as Boston College have established a Master's program dedicated to producing leaders equipped to assume international leadership roles in "a university, association, or policymaking organization" (Boston College, 2015). This program provides students with an introduction to international higher education as a field, opportunities to gain practical experience, comparisons of regional and global education higher systems, and with guidance toward producing research in the field.

Executive Higher Education Program

The late Doug Toma in the early 2000s established the first executive higher education doctoral program to prepare the next generation of higher education senior leadership (Selingo, 2003). Similar to the executive masters of business administration E-MBA, these are programs that allow working professionals to develop their knowledge of leadership while simultaneously still engaging in their full-time professional work obligations. (Forthum & Freeman, 2017b) noted,

In the United States, there are twelve universities that offer an executive doctorate in higher education. While these programs are all designed to target or accommodate working professionals, they vary in cost, program duration, number of graduate credits required, and residency requirements.

Grounding Higher Education as a Field of Scholarship

As academics in the field of higher education and researchers as well, the authors of this article have the great opportunity to supervise doctoral students as they explore the contemporary problems, issues, challenges, and positive attributes around higher education. In this process of inquiry, we are responsible for pushing our students to position their research within a particular theoretical framework or worldview. A theoretical framework is the lens through which these researchers view their topic and which establishes the confines for how the topic will be explored (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A theoretical framework should address four concepts that link and flow together to form a consistent message about how their topic of inquiry will be pursued. The four elements are: Philosophy, Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology. Being conscious of these constructs, aligns their study of higher education to the systematic methods necessary of a science or a field of study mentioned earlier in

this paper. There is also a more deepened philosophical element attached to the theory of higher education and higher education as a field of study. This is axiology. Axiology, which stems from two Greek words—*axios* or worth, and *logos* or reason, theory—is a relatively new discipline.

The problems and issues axiology investigates have been with us from the moment man began to reflect upon conditions of his life, the structure of reality, the order of nature and man's place in it . . . By his very nature man has been primarily interested in how things and events administer to his basic and derivative needs, how they satisfy or frustrate him, how to preserve and promote the good things of life and curtail and erase objects which stiffly his zest for living. A mere glance at the history of philosophy shows how deeply man has been preoccupied with the nature of values . . . Inquiry into the claims, truth, and validity of value judgments is a necessity of life itself. (Hart, 1971, p. 29)

Higher education is not just a thing or a product. Higher education is an emotionally charged space and decisions around the idea of a university are impacted by these emotions and value. Consider the emotions around the single mother using higher education to rise out of poverty creating a new economic reality for her family. Consider the researcher who spends years on a project leading to a discovery that positively changes the lives of people with Alzheimer's. As researchers consider the theory of higher education as a field of study (Thacker & Freeman, 2019) it cannot be done without having a philosophical consciousness about the value of the enterprise. We (the authors) believe as higher educationist that, "to value is to set priorities. It is to choose one thing over another. It is to think about things in relation to each other and decide that one is better than the other" (Clear Direction, Inc., 2001, para 3).

On a macro level, this similar ideology is necessary in order to work within the science of higher education and to experience it within the context of a field of study. To this end, the theoretical foundation of higher education is tied to its responsibility for the development of the individual student where learning for learning's sake is the central tenet. Higher education is about the refinement of culture. The second responsibility is for the university to be responsive to the needs of society and develop learners who can respond to the practicalities of life. Higher education is about meeting the functional needs of society. As Brubacher (1970) stated in his paper on the theory of higher education, there are, it seems, two current theories of a university. "According to the one theory the university has a certain self-authenticating quality which causes it to stand somewhat aloof from the social milieu. According to the other the university finds itself, not standing aloof, but caught up in the stresses and strains of contemporary events" (p. 99).

It is from these two overarching theories that researchers have a

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starting philosophical point to engage in an ontological, epistemological, and methodological inquiry into higher education and to develop a knowledge about higher education and its core functions around education, research, service, and governance. Researchers in the field of higher education cannot have “a preoccupation with knowledge without an accompanying theory of that knowledge” (Brubacher, 1970, p. 100). Much of this knowledge building is happening with faculty and students in graduate higher education programs across the country who are actively working to expand the narrative and dialogue around what a university is to be and how it functions.

The philosophical propositions that we outlined in this paper by using a script as a metaphor, (a) establishing a purpose for the field of study, (b) historical longevity, and (c) distinctive scholarship informed by theory and practice, has provided higher education as a field with the credibility to assert its own unique philosophical standing separate and distinct amongst other fields and disciplines.

What Role Will the Field of Study Play in the Future?

In the complex world of higher education, the future of this field of study will be defined by its ability to provide and establish a knowledge base which discusses a wide variety of issues around the four constructs mentioned in this paper: the educational enterprise, the nature and purpose of research, its societal role, and the governance of higher education institutions. This is the narrative that needs to be established. In creating and establishing this knowledge base, graduate higher education programs will be essential in bringing a knowledgeable workforce of leaders and practitioners who understand the dynamics of higher education and its various theories. For instance, there are many educational leadership programs across the country who are members of the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate. The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) is a Consortium of over 80 colleges and schools of education, which have committed resources to work together to undertake a critical examination of the doctorate in education (EdD) through dialog, experimentation, critical feedback and evaluation. “The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession” (CPED Website). The practice of graduate educational leadership programs is then designed around the following guiding principles:

The Professional doctorate in education:

- Is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.

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- Prepares leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities.
- Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and to build partnerships.
- Provides field-based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.
- Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.
- Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice. (CPED Website)

What is evident in these principles is a framework that shapes higher education as a field of study. As Goodchild (2014) shared, “Higher education is a multidisciplinary field of study “(p.16) that is informed by various disciplinary traditions such as psychology, sociology, and law. As we conclude, there are a few issues that will impact the field moving forward.

Higher Education as Both Actor and Director

In the last decade, discussions have intensified regarding the role and importance of providing guidelines and best practices for the field. For instance, some such as Hart and Ludwig (2014) and Colbeck and Southworth (2014) argued that there is no need for universal guidelines and perceive that such an approach would encroach upon the flexibility and autonomy that these programs have enjoyed from their founding. Whereas, (Freeman & Kochan, 2014) and Hagedorn and Purnamasari (2014) vigorously believe that guidelines would enhance the status of the young field and protect the smaller programs from the vicissitudes of possible closure.

The current reality is that the audience is watching higher education. The eyes of accountability and the eyes of those wanting to know are paying attention. We can no longer exist in the ivory towers and hide on the sides of the stage. Writers, thinkers, and academics are coming to the front of the stage to tell the story of higher education. These scholars are informed, educated, and articulate. These individuals, who are increasing in numbers each year, are using scientific practices to wade through rhetoric and direct a narrative that is derived from a philosophical understanding of a theory of knowledge about higher education. They are actors with a story about society, about learning, about understanding, and about leading that we all should see.

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