What Is a Doctorate?

A STATEMENT OF PRACTICAL ACTIONS
DEVELOPED BY AND FOR GRADUATE INSTITUTIONS

Over the last decade, a number of global trends affecting the definition and delivery of doctoral education have materialized. Seeking to standardize and clarify various degree types, several countries, regions, and organizations have advanced degree outcomes frameworks that more clearly articulate the desired outcomes of doctoral degrees. Meanwhile, significant growth in the number and types of professional doctorates has led to new questions about the difference between PhDs and professional doctorates. Finally and perhaps most importantly, disciplinary societies, funding agencies, graduate institutions, and students themselves have begun to put serious effort into understanding and diversifying the careers of PhD alumni.

The Council of Graduate Schools and the University of São Paulo invited representatives from 11 countries to explore these ideas at a two-day summit in São Paulo. At the Summit's conclusion, participants developed a set of *Practical Actions* to better understand the definitions and delivery of doctoral education. These recommended actions are intended as a menu of options for graduate institutions seeking to better prepare themselves and their students for the evolving doctorate.

Practical Actions – 2016 Global Summit

Definitions of the Doctorate

- Develop a glossary of common definitions for terms such as capabilities, competencies, and learning outcomes for doctoral education. Develop a list of various kinds of degrees across the world and identify the competencies and capabilities associated with them.
- Define and distinguish learning outcomes, competencies, and capabilities for professional doctorate vs. PhDs. Explore how professional doctorates can contribute to preparation for diverse careers.
- Commit to nuanced and inclusive language in all discussions of career outcomes. For example, we should speak of diverse career outcomes and avoid reductive binaries such as academic and non-academic careers. Likewise, all career outcomes should be given equal weighting and status, hence phrases such as 'alternative careers' which posit the academic career as optimal and others as plan b or c should be avoided.
- Provide leadership in the development of a nuanced but accessible meta-language in which we, our academic colleagues, candidates and graduates can talk persuasively about the skills, attributes and capabilities developed through doctoral research. We should then lead conversations in our communities -- with government and the wide and diverse range of employers of our graduates -- to enhance understanding of the PhD value proposition.
- Invite/challenge a wide and diverse range of employers to contribute to programs and events directed at enhancing doctoral student skill development. The relationship between the university and employers (or industry very broadly framed) should not be seen simply as the university as "producer" of the graduates "consumed" by these end-users, but more as an interface in which co-production of highly skilled graduates can occur.

Assessing Preparedness for Doctoral Study
- Use evidence-based holistic admissions processes that promote broader inclusion and diversity and maximize probability of student educational and career success. ([CGS Holistic Review](#))
- Advise students whose career interests are more suited to master's training to enter master's programs instead of doctoral programs.

Mentoring and Supervision
- Develop a document of best practices and principles for successful mentors/supervisors and include rubrics for evaluating and rewarding good supervision. Develop policies and procedures that embed contributions to high quality graduate mentoring in regular faculty rewards processes. Ensure supervision is adequately recognized in supervisor's work load and performance assessment. Include mentor training and doctoral student professional development approaches in training for junior faculty.
- Influence the culture of faculty mentoring of doctoral students by training doctoral students to be future faculty. Educate doctoral students to be effective/successful teachers and mentors for future graduate students as well as researchers. Develop within-university mechanisms for this, and use external resources for this training (e.g. [Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) website](#)).

Career Preparation and Training
- Identify local/national/international partnerships between industry and higher education. Establish partnerships with government, business, and industry to provide internship opportunities, applied research topics for dissertations, and mentors for doctoral students.
- Map transferable skills that arise from the process of doctoral work, determine ways in which skills can be measured and developed during their candidature, and have a conversation with a variety of employers to discuss ways in which these capabilities apply to business and industry.
- Enhance our understanding of doctoral education by extending the empirical basis for contributions made by doctoral graduates across a full range of careers. Better document the contributions of graduate education to the public good.
- Develop the empirical basis for identifying and refining high impact professional development practices. Include professional development for diverse careers into doctoral curricula, capstone projects (thesis/dissertation), and additional training opportunities and workshops. ([CGS Professional Development for STEM Graduate Students](#))

Doctoral Dissertations and Capstones
- Encourage discussion around the purpose, structure, and position of the dissertation in the context of the full range of desired doctoral attributes and outcomes. Develop best practices around the publication model of dissertations. ([CGS Future of the Doctorate](#))
- Develop a statement about the purpose and form of the oral examination.

Doctoral Assessment & Career Tracking
- Monitor career pathways of doctoral alumni. Use that information for continual improvement of doctoral curricula to be responsive to and anticipate needs in the employment marketplace. ([CGS Understanding Career Pathways](#))
- Develop recommendations for implementation and utilization of alumni surveys.
- Develop a protocol for an international benchmarking tool.

Further Information
Visit the Council of Graduate Schools' website for more information about the [2016 Global Summit](#).