2016

Professional Doctorates 2016: Updates and Further Recommendations

Walden University Professional Doctorate Working Group 2
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Content

Overview

Background

The first white paper, in 2012, [*Professional Doctorates: Literature, History, and Recommendations*](), defined where the university community stood on the unique challenges and opportunities of awarding professional doctorates alongside academic doctorates (PhDs). At that time, members of the first working group integrated their best thinking, a review of the scholarship, and an assessment of the special demands of online education to identify strategies to guide revision and development of new professional doctorate programs. That working group included members from the Center for Research Quality and program representatives with a commitment to improving professional doctorates at Walden and an interest in differentiating them from the PhD programs while ensuring doctoral rigor.

Because of the dynamic nature of doctoral education, a decision was made in 2016 to revisit that white paper, and a new working group was empaneled. The second working group included individuals with a variety of professional backgrounds and direct experience working with professional doctorate students, and who could look at the university's efforts with a fresh perspective. All of the current and in-development professional doctorate programs were represented, as well as the Center for Research Quality. The list of members is included in the masthead.

At the time of the first white paper, the university had only three professional doctorate programs: the **Doctor of Education** (EdD), the **Doctorate of Business Administration** (DBA), and the **Doctorate of Nursing Practice** (DNP), which had just started admitting students. At the start of 2016, based in large part on the guidance in the first white paper, Walden had successfully launched professional doctorate programs across all colleges, adding the **Doctor of Public Health** (DrPH), the **Doctor of Information Technology** (DIT), the **Doctor of Social Work** (DSW), and the **Doctor of Health Administration** (DHA). Two others are in final development: the **Doctor of Psychology** (PsyD) and **Doctor of Public Administration** (DPA).

Impact of the First White Paper

The original white paper on professional doctorates was shared widely with the university community and informed subsequent efforts at development of the professional doctorates. Some examples of the impact follow:

- The paper provided a type of "template" for professional doctorates that were subsequently developed, thereby keeping them aligned with all other university process but allowing for some differences within the group.
- A checklist was created for product development efforts to document how each new professional doctorate aligned with the core descriptors in the white paper.
- The section on research training in the first white paper became important to discussions of updating the core research sequence.
- The document served as an educational tool for program leaders who were tasked with leading a professional doctorate along with an academic doctorate.

- The working group chair shared the results of this effort at an international conference (Salter, 2012) and in a follow-up publication (Salter, 2013).

Purpose

The charge to this second working group was to examine the 2012 recommendations and clarify Walden's position on professional doctorates. Unlike the first effort that addressed differences between professional and academic doctorates, the expectations for this group were to focus on the commonalities in the university's professional doctorates; set clear and consistent definitions, standards, and requirements for our professional doctorates; and link those programs to employment paths more directly. From the outset, the working group acknowledged that any outcome will be a "living document" that continues to be refined as discussion continues in the university community.

A good point to start this discussion is to review the key outcomes from the first white paper, as they framed this effort:
1. A set of common standards for program development,
2. Identification of some additional competencies for professional doctorates,
3. And a clear statement that "one size does *not* fit all" and that, although the university can have some basic standards for professional doctorate programs, there need to be specific, field-based considerations for both curriculum and capstone requirements.

The second working group certainly acknowledged the validity of those key findings but was able to supplement and clarify where needed, especially in regard to that final admonition. One thing was abundantly clear throughout this process: Then, as now, Walden's expansion in the realm of professional doctorates aligned with its core missions to make doctoral education accessible and to support positive social change.

In this 2016 edition of "Professional Doctorates," the updated information and deliverables include
1. Insights from the most recent and useful scholarship on professional doctorates and current accreditation information on professional doctorate scholarship,
2. Updated expectations for professional doctorate program components,
3. Clear capstone requirements that transcend field-based capstone formats,
4. Guidance on using the recommended program and capstone recommendations, and
5. Implications for alternative capstones adoption within Walden.

Revisiting the First White Paper

For the previous white paper, the working group reviewed the history and scholarship on doctoral education, with a specific focus on the implications for emerging professional doctorate programs. Since completion of the first white paper, the prevalence of this type of degree (both globally and at Walden, as well as online and residential) has expanded, and the scholarship around it has grown accordingly. This new working group reviewed some of that literature, as part of this initiative, and was able to extend and augment the original findings.

Professional Doctorates in 2016

One observable, general trend over the past few years is the continued discussion of the scope and purpose of professional doctorates as doctoral degrees (e.g., Bourner & Simpson, 2014; Costley, 2013; Costley & Lester, 2012; Fox & Slade, 2014), which have truly become an international phenomenon (e.g., Kot & Hendel, 2012; Loxley & Seery, 2012; O'Neill, 2012; Pechar, Ates, & Andres, 2012). This rapid growth can be a cause of concern, given the flood of people with doctoral degrees potentially "diluting the professions," or a source of comfort, given the needs of society for advanced professionals who can translate findings to innovate and solve important problems. What appears to be a current movement from a "knowledge economy" to an "innovation economy" is a key consideration to some of the recommendations herein.

The other trend, which was pleasantly surprising, reflects the specific disciplinary-level discussions in the scholarship. Understandably, educators are concerned with the educational processes for all learners, and useful guidance continues to emerge from the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate effort (e.g., Hochbein & Perry, 2015; Perry & Imig, 2010; Storey & Hesbol, 2014). Increasingly, the business management field engages in conversations about professional practice and the need for adding clarity around the goals of the DBA (e.g., Banerjee & Morley, 2013; De Meyer, 2013; Gill & Mullarkey, 2015; Grabowski & Miller, 2015). One field that seems actively engaged in this topic is nursing, and the DNP has been the focus of much conversations since the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (2006, 2015) *Essentials* guidance was published (e.g., Alexander, 2016; Kirkpatrick & Weaver, 2013; Romano & Hinshaw, 2015). Other disciplines that seem to be considering the implications of professional doctorates are social work (e.g., Anastas & Videka, 2012; Diaz, 2015; Hartocollis, Cnaan, & Ledwith, 2014; Thyer, 2015) and, to a lesser extent, information technology (e.g., Burmeister, 2015; Hosack & Sagers, 2015) and public health and health administration (e.g., Calhoun, McElligott, Weist, & Raczynski, 2012; Fottler, 2007).

Stewardship of Practice

As discussed in detail in the previous white paper, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching evoked a metaphor of *stewardship* as a way to help students (and faculty) to appreciate the broader responsibilities of having a doctorate and to see themselves as not simply managers of their careers (Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin-Bueschel, & Hutchings, 2009, p. 12). To this end, they highlighted three behavioral characteristics of stewardship that apply to both types of degrees—*generation*, *conservation*, and *transformation*. This approach to conceptualizing doctoral education is slowly finding its way into the broader discourse (e.g., Fong, 2014).

Since that time, transformation and translation have emerged as important aspects for stewards of practice (Perry, 2016). Hence, professional doctorate students should be trained as scholars who can take their experiences and merge them with training in research and theory to solve problems of practice and provide real change within a variety of settings. Rather than replicate that original conversation here, the current working group would add a few embellishments and details to the table that appeared in the first white paper.

Table 1. *Differences in Stewardship: Professional Doctorates Versus Academic Doctorates*

Domain	Degree Type	
	Professional Doctorate	*Academic Doctorate*
Generation of knowledge	The researching professional • Able to demonstrate use of research and evaluation skills in professional settings • Can generate or utilize existing data to solve problems, innovate and understand organizational issues	The professional researcher • Able to demonstrate use of research skills to inform theory • Trained in a variety of methodologies in order to inform theory and further the field
Conservation of valuable and useful ideas	The practitioner-scholar • Practice is the priority and the primary lens	The scholar-practitioner • Theory and advancement in the field and scholarship are the primary lenses
Transformation and dissemination of those understandings	Enterprising self • Utilizes research findings for problem solving and **transformation** within the workplace	Autonomous scholar • Is able to plan, design, implement, interpret, and publish scholarly research

The Practitioner-Scholar Model

The scientist-practitioner (later, scholar-practitioner) model emerged in 1947 at the Boulder Conference to capture the type of doctoral-level academic research done in clinical psychology (Horn et al., 2007). This basic model of research in applied disciplines has evolved much over the years. With the emergence of professional doctorates, however, the notion has been flipped around to reflect their mission better: the *practitioner-scholar* (Hochbein & Perry, 2015; Thyer, 2015). This added nuance has forced institutions, including Walden, to wrestle with what these two general orientations mean within their contexts and how they shape curricula and performance criteria.

To understand best what being a practitioner-scholar means for professional doctorates, it is helpful to consider what specific competencies appear in the literature. For example, Kormanik, Lehner, and Winnick (2009) discussed DBA competencies that fit with specific job activities and employer needs. Those competencies most relevant to all professional doctorates include dealing with ambiguity, organizational agility, strategic agility, listening, creativity, interpersonal savvy, decision quality, integrity and trust, ethics, and technical skills (Kormanik et al., 2009). Additionally, critical thinking and reflexivity have been identified as core skills essential for professional doctorate students (Anderson & Gold, 2015). Research, reflexivity, and critical thinking have been seen as important in other domains (e.g., Fenge, 2009; Rolfe & Davies, 2009;

Sambrook & Stewart, 2008). These lines of thinking are incorporated into the recommendations made below.

Employment Preparation

A doctoral degree is a means to an end for most Walden graduates—an improved employment situation. Given that many professional doctorate graduates will seek to work within organizations and community settings, the university community should be mindful that they will be competing for those positions directly with individuals holding masters degrees or PhDs. Therefore, the working group would like to reassert clearly the critical need that these graduates' training adequately prepares them to work within a variety of settings; that their doctoral capstones demonstrate their distinct competencies in innovation, translation, and transformation; and that they can clearly and effectively communicate these strengths.

These attributes, which will make Walden graduates more competitive, are actualized in the curriculum and demonstrated in the doctoral capstone. Toward those goals, the committee would specifically note Walden's expanding interests in international settings. With the evolving student base should come an evolving vision of employment opportunities for Walden's graduates, including links to international employment entities such as the various United Nations agencies.

Curriculum Considerations

In response to a rapidly changing job market, many traditional and online institutions are adding professional doctorates to their offerings, and many of these degrees have become more specific and differentiated (Adragna & Gatewood, 2014; Banerjee & Morley, 2013; Chipere, 2015)—facts that were observed by the first working group. The current state of the scholarship on doctoral education suggests that most schools (and professions) have a sense of what these programmatic goals should be and that some areas, such public health and education, have long histories of promoting and delivering professional practice degrees. Little specific curricular guidance is available that transcends the broader category of professional doctorates, although many programs seem to be modeled on the academic doctorate, despite the fact that that training approach has not changed much in centuries.

So, the onus is partly on universities to determine and defend the best strategies for developing professional doctorate programs. For Walden, and to be consistent both within and across professional fields, this working group agreed that professional doctorate programs should focus on specific skills and competencies that support transformation, problem solving, and quality improvement. Research skills in professional doctorates should be used in service of innovation and informing change. Curricular alignment to the doctoral capstone and to professional activities is essential for student success. It is critical that students are prepared with adequate applied research training and the clear ability to translate this application to solve problems and drive improvements within organizations and communities.

From Research to Practice to Social Change

Since the last professional doctorate white paper, more discussion has emerged in the literature on the true need for professional doctorates in society to close the gap between research and

practice and thereby truly impact society (Storey & Fulton, 2016). In talking with colleagues at conferences, many members of this working group saw wonderful confirmatory findings in fields like education, psychology, and public policy. As academics, they are pleased to see this work, but as practitioners, are also disheartened that many of these efforts have not yet informed educational practice, psychotherapy, or government policy.

This needed change in orientation about the role of research in practice may account for the increased global focus on professional doctorates. Many people, trained under a PhD model, understood that their research efforts were small steps taken towards a greater "truth" and that, with enough compilation of research, eventually their work could have an impact. For many people with a professional doctorate, however, they need to make an impact that is immediate and effective, gained through evaluation and evidence-based decision making. To ensure this competence, it is essential that the curriculum prepares the student for both the doctoral capstone and professional expectations.

Traditional "knowledge for knowledge's sake" academic research is increasingly being seen as limited in its usefulness for professional environments. An important callout here is that the research *process* is not at issue, but rather, how that process is executed and applied to advance the goals and functioning of the organization in which it is conducted. That is, the ability to use research skills to translate findings directly to practice is desirable in today's workforce environment (Stewart, 2015). Further, when considering both employer expectations and society's needs, a professional doctorate can be an engine to support effective change (Kochar-Bryant, 2016). Therefore, for their efforts to be locally valid but potentially useful across contexts to support social change, professional doctorate students need to know the language and processes of research.

The research training offered to Walden's professional doctorate students was a topic of much discussion for the first white paper, as was the case for this second working group, as well. Innovative solutions logically require innovative methodologies, and doctoral training can empower students with useful tools and capstone activities that have immediate utility. Approaches such as action research, program evaluation, and consultation can directly impact organizations, and systematic reviews can translate years of academic research into a plan for improved practice. The working group was encouraged by current efforts to update the university's research courses to address these goals.

Reframing the Doctoral Capstone

Traditionally, a doctoral capstone has been the method by which doctoral students demonstrate their research literacy and competence, whether a dissertation or doctoral/project study at Walden. Hence, the first working group worked to clarify how the professional and academic doctoral capstones can and should be "different but equal". This second working group dug a little deeper, and explored the premise that a different type of capstone may require a different type of format. As may be indicative of this liminal time in doctoral education, the scholarship around this topic is a bit confusing, as the labels applied to these various projects don't always reflect what was actually done. For example, it may be fair to ask how a dissertation-in-practice that an EdD student might conduct is functionally different than a dissertation in a practice-based discipline that a student pursing a PhD in education would execute (Storey & Hesbol, 2014).

While recognizing that some professional doctorate programs offer traditional dissertations that they referred to as applied, the working group also noted that others are increasingly using alternative approaches to support time-to-completion and ensure clear connection with potential employers and postgraduate experiences (Israel, Stewart, Sostak, & Bazzi-Moughania, 2016; Stewart, 2015). This group felt that "the time is right" to discuss alternative formats for the doctoral capstone at Walden and has offered some recommendations to support other specific initiatives at the university on this topic. Suffice it all to say that, for a university that serves so many students at a distance, the potential of Walden graduates to support global positive social change through their doctoral capstones is notable. Through access to training not available in some developing countries, the capstones completed by professional doctorate graduates will use data-supported ideas to solve practical, real problems and develop innovations to improve policies and local resources.

Recommendations

The 2016 Walden Professional Doctorate Working Group members convened regularly over the course of 4 months and carefully reviewed the previous white paper, in addition to current scholarship. Drawing on the depth of their experiences as practitioners and graduate educators, each week, they had dynamic discussions of ways to support both current and future professional doctorate students. To answer their charge, they offer the following recommendations:

Define a Walden Professional Doctorate

Early on, much of their discussion focused on simply defining the Walden professional doctorate, because it was believed among the group that all updates would flow from this clarity. This definition should serve as an overriding mission that the university can defend both internally and externally. After review of the literature and robust discussion of the mission and impact desired for Walden students, the group arrived at consensus with the following definition:

> *Walden professional doctorate programs prepare students to translate their doctoral preparation and research to assess needs, collaboratively plan, make decisions, solve problems, and inform change within organizational contexts within their fields of practice. Through this process, graduates innovate and transform organizations and communities and contribute to positive social change.*

Acknowledge the Role of Accreditation

Review of the doctoral programs at Walden often evolves into discussions of differences and similarities. Because the charge was to make recommendations for all professional doctorates, the working group spent a lot of time looking at commonalities among the degrees, which are reflected in many of the subsequent recommendations. They recognized that they would be remiss if they did not acknowledge the increasing demands of the professional fields on these programs, especially the importance of accreditation standards in shaping curricular expectations for professional doctorates.

Even here, they saw diversity. Some program areas have clearly approved standards for professional accreditation (e.g., the DrPH), others have shared guidelines and seem to be moving in that direction (e.g., the EdD and DNP), and some areas are only just beginning to identify an articulated set of expectations for their professional doctorates. In light of this complexity, the working group endeavored to move forward with some recommendations. A long-term university strategy to seek accreditation for professional doctorates when feasible is needed, and professional and accreditation standards must be the starting point in program design and evaluation.

Establish a Core Set of Professional Doctorate Competencies

To use the label "professional doctorate" begs a question about the attributes that are shared among these degrees. The working group could not find much scholarly discussion that cuts across professional areas in this way, however, so they felt they were in a unique position to identity those commonalities. The first professional doctorate working group had very

substantive discussions that resulted in three emergent assumptions for professional doctorates at Walden, of which there were only three at that time.

1. Knowledge produced by research must be grounded in practice and application.
2. Practice must be informed by knowledge provided through research.
3. Both practice and research must be focused on assuring positive social change.

Even though there were now nine professional doctorate degrees represented on the working group, they were able to build on those assumptions by creating a set of competencies that aligns with the abovementioned definition and should ensure consistency in preparedness of Walden graduates. To create these competencies, the working group not only reviewed articles but also the literature from accreditation and professional bodies across the fields. Below are the competencies that gained consensus among the group.

Core Competency 1: Professional Preparation (Knowledge, Skills, and Readiness)

Walden professional doctorate graduates possess historical and current knowledge of their profession, applicable practitioner skills relevant to their profession, and readiness to engage professionally in domestic and international settings.

Core Competency 2: Expertise in Evaluation and Resolution

Walden professional doctorate graduates exhibit expertise in the current issues facing their profession, skills in the design and assessment of programs to address those challenges, and the ability to pioneer approaches to resolution.

Core Competency 3: Research Methodology Comprehension and Application

Walden professional doctorate graduates comprehend both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, are able to design strategies that produce meaningful information, can synthesize and interpret those findings, and can apply them to improving and transforming organizations and communities.

Of note: With these expectations in mind, these students' research training should include training in the appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodologies appropriate for solving problems in their field and clear information on how findings can be translated into improving practice. Justification should be provided as to what the critical methodologies within a field are. As they have gone through the review process, the current university research courses are being updated to provide a breadth of training that includes research skills applicable to all professional doctorates.

Core Competency 4: Interdependent Mindfulness and Cultural Competency

Walden professional doctorate graduates practice awareness and reflection in honoring diversity and inclusion in their profession. As such, they are effective in working across cultures and supporting effective collaboration in diverse environments.

Core Competency 5: Technology

Walden professional doctorate graduates demonstrate expertise in the use of 21st-century technologies to support their role as practitioner-scholars in their field.

Core Competency 6: Social Change and Transformation

Walden professional doctorate graduates are able to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions that their work makes to assuring positive social change and to develop initiatives and evidence that transform organizations leading to social change.

Core Competency 7: Reflective Practice

Walden professional doctorate graduates engage in reflective practice activities so as to be effective leaders and change agents. Doctoral-level practitioners recognize the personal limitations of their capacity, possess the skills to both self-diagnose and remediate any shortcomings, and continuously strive to improve.

Establish "Essential Elements" for All Doctoral Capstones at Walden

The ability to generate knowledge (in all its forms) is a large part of what puts the "doctoral" in doctoral degree, and although it may be called different things, research is the mechanism that drives that process. While recognizing the diversity in intention and approach used by doctoral candidates to complete a capstone in both academic and professional programs, the working group felt it important to articulate the ways in which they are all "doctoral-level" efforts. They contend that a doctoral capstone at Walden, as part of either a professional or academic doctorate, should have the following *essential elements*:

Addresses a Doctoral-Level Problem

In the first white paper, maintaining doctoral quality was emphasized, and the *[Litmus Test for a Doctoral-Level Problem](#)* emerged at that time, as an essential tool toward that goal. Since then, the *Litmus Test* has been used by supervisory committees and in academic residencies and has been embedded in the premise and prospectus processes in most programs. The working group reinforced that this simple set of standards continues to be a viable basis from which a range of doctoral capstones can be conceived and executed. Even when the problem is local or specific to a context, the *Litmus Test* can be used to ensure that it is worthy of doctoral investigation and will inform a gap in practice.

Is Grounded in a Deep and Thorough Understanding of the Problem

This element includes an understanding of the individuals and organization(s) impacted by the problem, the current state of the evidence and research findings related to the problem, the frameworks and theories that inform the problem, and a thorough review of approaches that have been used successfully to address the problem.

Uses a Methodical and Systematic Approach

This area was raised in the original white paper and can still be a source of challenge and confusion for some of our current professional doctorates. It is important to be clear here that

a capstone is more than a review or summary of existing evidence and uses appropriate "data" (broadly conceived) that are collected systematically and analyzed for the purpose of gaining new insights and knowledge related to the problem. The results of the analysis should inform the "solution" to the problem resulting from a gap in knowledge or a gap in practice.

Demonstrates a Doctoral-Level Analysis and Solution

Additionally, there have been challenges across programs in using the appropriate analysis for a doctoral investigation. The working group is not prescribing a certain level of sophistication of analysis, but rather an analysis that appropriately answers doctoral-level questions and provides results that are truly meaningful and can inform useful solutions. For example, a *t* test on whether a questionnaire was easy to read and understand is not a doctoral-level investigation. Given that some programs have raised concerns around a need for more clarity here, the working group supports the current effort to update the *Litmus Test* to include criteria for both a doctoral-level analysis and solution.

Makes a Meaningful Contribution

There must be useful information and a "deliverable" for the organization or community stakeholder, as well as the professional field and/or discipline. Completing the capstone is not enough. It needs to be clear within the capstone that findings will be used to inform positive change in the setting and field, which should be stated specifically, while supporting the Walden mission of positive social change.

Continue to Identify Key Differentiators

As the working group considered appropriate options for capstones for our professional doctorate students (discussed next), they felt it was essential to also have clear, basic expectations for professional doctorates that differentiate their doctoral capstones from the academic dissertations completed by Walden's PhD students. While the first white paper working group tackled this topic quite explicitly, this working group reviewed work by Dawson and Kumar (2016), who proposed guiding principles for professional practice dissertations. Many of these principles are useful, but the working group found that they may be a bit too detailed and confining for the breadth of professional doctorate capstones that must be considered at Walden. The three pertinent themes, though, would apply here:
1. Addresses critical problems of practice,
2. Demonstrates research rigor skills involving real theory and inquiry, and
3. Demonstrates the practical impact of the research (Dawson & Kumar, 2016, p. 135).

Empanel a Standing Committee for Professional Doctorates

The first working group provided a detailed history of doctoral education at Walden, including the fact that the academic doctorates share many operational and educational strategies that strengthen them as a group. Because of how each of the professional doctorates was developed, this type of collective energy has not emerged. Therefore, this working group recommends establishment of a standing committee for the professional doctorates with the goals of providing increased interaction among these programs leaders, sharing of best practices and operational

solutions, development of university policy recommendations that serve the needs of these students, and continuing the discussion of this working group, thus obviating the need for others.

Explore Alternative Capstone Formats

Having a clear set of common "essentials" and some differentiators makes the next discussion much easier to engage. At the moment, the culminating projects conducted by professional doctorate students are similar in structure and approach, albeit not by name. Hence, a very important discussion within the working group concerned alternative formats for doctoral capstones—collaborative projects, work-based/consulting capstones, portfolios, multiarticle portfolios, among others—that the working group perceived as being used more commonly in traditional and nontraditional institutions.

The purposes of these departures from the classic five-chapter dissertation can include assisting with timely degree completion and ensuring translation and usage of findings in workplace and community settings. Additionally, different formats have the potential to demonstrate clearly to current and potential employers the valuable skills of Walden graduates.

Challenges and strengths of various options were discussed, and the working group identified a few options that would align with both improving time to degree and ensuring quality:
1. Work-based capstone: This approach would translate well across programs and settings. Strong faculty guidance would be needed, and an individual doctoral-level Walden deliverable (beyond a client summary report) would be essential (e.g., Dawson & Kumar, 2016).
2. Portfolio model: This approach may work well because it would demonstrate a variety of skills and can be developed across the entire program instead of at the end, which can impact time to degree (e.g., Maxwell & Kupczyk-Romanczuk, 2009).
3. Collaborative capstone/dissertation: This format also would need an individual submission/deliverable, but participants would benefit from shared knowledge and collaboration (e.g., Guo & Rose, 2015). Faculty members could be the lead researchers and guide students from their area of expertise. Research has also shown this to improve time to degree.

The overriding conclusion of the group is that alternative formats may offer exciting options for our professional doctorates and should definitely be considered as these alternatives are proposed. The risk of these approaches would only be when criteria are not clear and, potentially, a poor impression is made with stakeholders and external partners due to work that does not add value at a doctoral level. With these caveats in mind, the need for clear and specific capstone criteria is emphasized, and the working group felt a variety of formats could meet the essential components of a capstone that they identified. Further, all capstones will use rubrics and checklists and have an individual deliverable for assessment, all at the level of doctoral quality typical of dissertations, but can include certain additional criteria to determine what is appropriate and how it can be adapted within Walden.

Rename the Professional Doctorate Capstone

Concerns over the name of the doctoral capstone were discussed within the group. The vagueness of terms like *doctoral study* and *project study* (or even the term *capstone*, for that matter) was seen as making the expectations less clear, and potentially putting our graduates at a disadvantage. Initially, the working group suggested that, while capstones may look different, they should all include the term *dissertation* so that a recognizable quality standard was clear. While that type of recognition is true, it is important to not misrepresent alternative capstones as traditional dissertations. The literature has mixed information on this and refers to dissertations in a variety of ways.

After further review with university leadership, it was determined that the name of the capstone was not as critical as clear requirements and deliverables that demonstrated graduate skills. With that in mind, names should be considered carefully for each professional doctorate capstone. Some environments value a "doctoral dissertation," while in others, it could be a deterrent. Clear criteria and outcomes will be essential for program quality.

Next Steps

The 2016 Professional Doctorate Working Group was empaneled to help ensure that the university community is using the most current thinking and enhanced clarity in developing and revising its professional doctorate programs. With this goal in mind, they would make the following recommendations for next steps:

1. Walden *Professional Doctorate Core Competencies* should be used to guide all new program development and be used in for all academic program reviews.
2. Walden professional doctorate research training should be reviewed in all programs. Current university research courses used by PhD and some professional doctorate programs include sound training that can translate across disciplines and should ensure doctoral-level capstones, regardless of format.
3. Walden *Doctoral Capstone Essential Elements* should be used to guide all capstone proposals, including PhD dissertation and alternative capstones. Before a doctoral capstone can be accepted, it must align with the criteria stated within the essentials.
4. Finally, the working group asked that this paper be a "living document" that is updated yearly (or more frequently to reflect our best knowledge and current programs). With that goal in mind, a process for review and update will be needed.

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