

A Century of Doctoral Degrees: How Many Have There Been?

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Abstract

The doctoral degree has been in existence for more than eight centuries. The name *doctor* was interchangeable with professor and teacher, and has conferred the ability to teach upon its recipients since a papal bull of 1292 (*ius ubique docendi*), delivered by Pope Nicholas IV. The doctoral degree types can be categorized into three groups: the honorary doctorates, the professional-type earned doctorates, and the research-type earned doctorates. The professional non-research-type doctoral degrees (i.e., M.D., D.D.S., J.D., and others) incorporate the term ‘doctor.’ The honorary doctorate and the professional degrees were not researched in this study.

There were 51 research-oriented doctoral titles listed in Appendix A that are recognized as being equivalent to the Ph.D. by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education (2005b). That list dropped to about half that number by 2008 (Department of Education, 2010). The two most popular degrees are the Ph.D. and the Ed.D. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree was first awarded in the U.S. by Yale University in 1861 and the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree was first awarded in the 1920s by Harvard University. There are claims that the popularity of the Ed.D. increased until incidences of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. (in education) degrees awarded were equal by 1941, that the Ed.D. continued to be the dominant degree throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and the Ph.D. has been the dominant degree since the late 1970s (Cardozier, 1987). A review of ProQuest’s *Dissertations and Theses* database was used to investigate these earlier claims.

Introduction

The ProQuest *Dissertations & Theses* database indicates there is an average of 50,000 doctoral dissertations produced every year since 1990. Dissertations have many characteristics such as integrity and objectivity, and “high-quality research should be characterized by publication” (Mauch & Birch, 1998, p. 15) so it is available to the people who can use it. Scholarly publishing is important for doctoral students attempting to enter the academic profession because “published research leads to promotions and tenure. Higher salaries come with publications ... [and] many good things happen to those who publish” (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995, p. 116). An earlier National Science Foundation study of 10,000 doctorate holders identified the three major components of job satisfaction to be (a) salary, (b) relationship of job to graduate study, and (c) publishing; however, the authors point out that publishing is on the job satisfaction list only because it relates to salary (Solman & Hurwicz, 1978). It is important for doctoral students to publish because “early publication, including publication before the doctorate, predicts future production rate and total production” (Blackburn & Lawrence, pp. 79-80).

The Doctoral Degree

The doctoral degree has been in existence for more than eight centuries (Noble, 1994, p. 8). The name *doctor* was interchangeable with professor and teacher, and has conferred the ability to teach upon its recipients since a papal bull of 1292 (*ius ubique docendi*), delivered by Pope Nicholas IV (Noble, 1994; Radford, 2001).

The Ph.D. and the Ed.D. Degrees

The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree is thought to be more broadly focused and applied, as compared to the Ph.D. degree which is more narrowly focused and research oriented. Archbold (1991) describes the highest degrees in our educational system thusly:

In academic circles, the Ph.D. is thought to be more comprehensive and prestigious than the Ed.D. The Ph.D. degree focuses on preparation for scholarly, research-oriented work. The Ed.D is thought to be less rigorous; it centers on preparation for professional activities. Individuals who aspire to scholarly positions will usually seek the Ph.D., while individuals who choose to pursue professional jobs will seek the Ed.D. more frequently. There will be highly successful recipients in both degree categories. (pp. 81-82)

Archbold (1991), in her study of UCLA doctoral graduates, further stated that there have been no studies that reported the difference in career success related to attaining a Ph.D. rather than an Ed.D degree (p. 28). The concern with differences between the two degrees dates to 1931 (Freeman, 1931), only 8 years after the Ed.D. was first awarded (Cardozier, 1987).

One study comparing Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs ($n = 353$ respondents) in education, found that “slightly different models of factors were obtained for the Ph.D. and Ed.D. graduates” (Allen, 1996, p. ii), but the driving factors were visa status, type of department, and age. Allen’s (1996) study confirmed an earlier finding that the requirements for the two degrees are similar (Anderson, 1983). Brown (1990) states that “students pursuing the Ed.D. do not differ greatly from Ph.D. students in their evaluation of the contextual and structural features of their doctoral study to any significant extent” (p. 15). Another study found there was very little difference between the two types of degrees, but the Ph.D. dissertations were more likely to use high level statistics (Nelson & Coorough, 1994). A 10-criteria comparative study by Eells (1963) concluded that “in both theoretical and pragmatic matters, the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees are treated alike by the major agencies to which one would turn for information concerning them” (p. 36). Similarly, in discussing the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees offered by the University of Pennsylvania, Toma (2002) states that the

...dissertation requirements are different for the two degrees, but more in theory than in fact. As a rule, Ed.D. students write a 125 or so page thesis evaluating a practical problem in higher education, while Ph.D. students are expected to produce longer theses that develop theory based on original research. Rarely is the distinction that clear. (p. 20)

Mallette's (2009) study about publishing rates of University of California graduates found that Ph.D. graduates publish significantly more than Ed.D. graduates ($p = .001$) but there were no significant publishing differences by graduation year, UC campus location, or gender.

Augusto's (2009) dissertation about dissertations in educational administration:

... defined the purpose, expectations and qualities of PhD and EdD dissertations in education administration. The findings demonstrate that while notable differences exist between PhD and EdD dissertations, most of the participants [faculty] identify similarities in the purpose, expectations, and quality of EdD and PhD dissertations. (p. 135)

These studies have all showed that there is little difference between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees and the difference in publishing rate supports common belief that the "Ph.D. degree focuses on preparation for scholarly, research-oriented work [and t]he Ed.D. centers on preparation for professional activities" (Archbold, 1991, p. 81).

Overview of Doctoral Degree Types

According to Eells (1963, p. 19), the doctoral degree types can be categorized into two groups: the honorary doctorates and the earned doctorates. The honorary doctorate is not discussed in this study. The earned doctorates can be subdivided into professional-type and research-type – both are discussed in the following section. Eells further subdivides *research-type* doctorates into three categories: (a) Ph.D., (b), Ed.D., and (c) Others. All three categories of these research-type doctorates are discussed in the next paragraphs.

Research-type Doctor of Philosophy. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree was first awarded in the U.S. by Yale University in 1861 (Baez, 2002, p. 49; Cardozier, 1987, p. 75; Noble, 1994, p. 73). The Ed.D. is awarded for studies in the field of education, but the Ph.D. can be awarded in many disciplines. The first awarded Ph.D. *in education* was awarded in 1893 at Teachers College, Columbia University (Brown, 1990, p. 2; Mason, 1998, p. 14), although Eells

(1963, p. 29) claims that it was given by Clark University in 1892.

Research-type Doctor of Education. The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree was first awarded in either 1921 (Eells, 1963, p. 28) or 1923 (Cardozier, 1987, p. 75) by Harvard University. The Ed.D. was first awarded by the University of California in 1924 (Eells, 1963, p. 29). Cardozier (1987) indicated that the popularity of the Ed.D. increased until incidences of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees awarded were equal by 1941. The Ed.D. continued to be the dominant degree throughout the 1950s and 1960s. One reason for the popularity of the Ed.D. was the lack of foreign language requirements (p. 76). The language requirements for the Ph.D. were relaxed in the 1970s and the Ph.D. has been the dominant degree since the late 1970s (Brown, 1990; Cardozier, 1987; Mason, 1998).

Other research-type doctoral degrees. There are 51 research-oriented doctoral titles that are recognized as being equivalent to the Ph.D. by the Department of Education and the U.S. National Science Foundation (Noble, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2005b). That list dropped to about half that number by 2008 (Department of Education, 2010). The 2005 list is in Appendix A and the shortened 2008 list is in Appendix B. These doctoral titles include the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Arts (D.A.), Doctor of Theology (Th.D.), and the Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.).

Professional non-research-type doctoral degrees. There are also several professional degrees that “incorporate the term ‘doctor,’ but they are not research doctorates and not equivalent to the Ph.D.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a, para. 2). These professional non-research degrees include Doctor of: Chiropractic (D.C.), Dental Science (D.D.S), Medicine (M.D.), Optometry (O.D.), Osteopathy (D.O.), Pharmacy (Pharm.D.), Podiatry (P.D.), Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), and the Juris Doctor (J.D.; U.S. Department of Education, 2005a). These

professional degrees were not researched in this study.

The Ed.D. and the doctor of psychology (Psy.D.) degrees are both offered by the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. Interestingly, the Psy.D. degree is not listed in either the U.S. Department of Education (2005b, 2010) or as a professional non-research-type doctoral degree.

ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* Database

The methodology utilized the *Advanced Search* feature of the ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database. The numbers of dissertations were searched by degree type by year or decade to get the results tabulated in this article. For example, for the first line of Table C2 in Appendix C, the researcher searched for: 'Ph.D.' in the degree category, and 'Doctoral dissertations' only in the manuscript type category, and 'Education' in the Subject name/code option, and 'Specific date range ... 01/01/1900 to 12/31/1909' in the Date range category.

Number of Doctorates in the Last Century

The number of doctoral degrees since 1900 listed in the ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database is tabulated in Table C1 in Appendix C and shown graphically in Figure 1. The degrees are identified by decade from the 1900s to the 2000s. It appeared that the Ed.D. was not commonly used until the 1990s and the Educat.D. degree was the dominant degree in education. For this study, the author assumed that the Educat.D. doctoral degree was the more popular name for the Ed.D. prior to about 1990, and E+E is the sum of all Ed.D. and Educat.D. degrees. Please see the caveat section below. It is clear from this data that number of all Ph.D. degrees has always exceeded the combined number of Ed.D. and Educat.D. degrees.

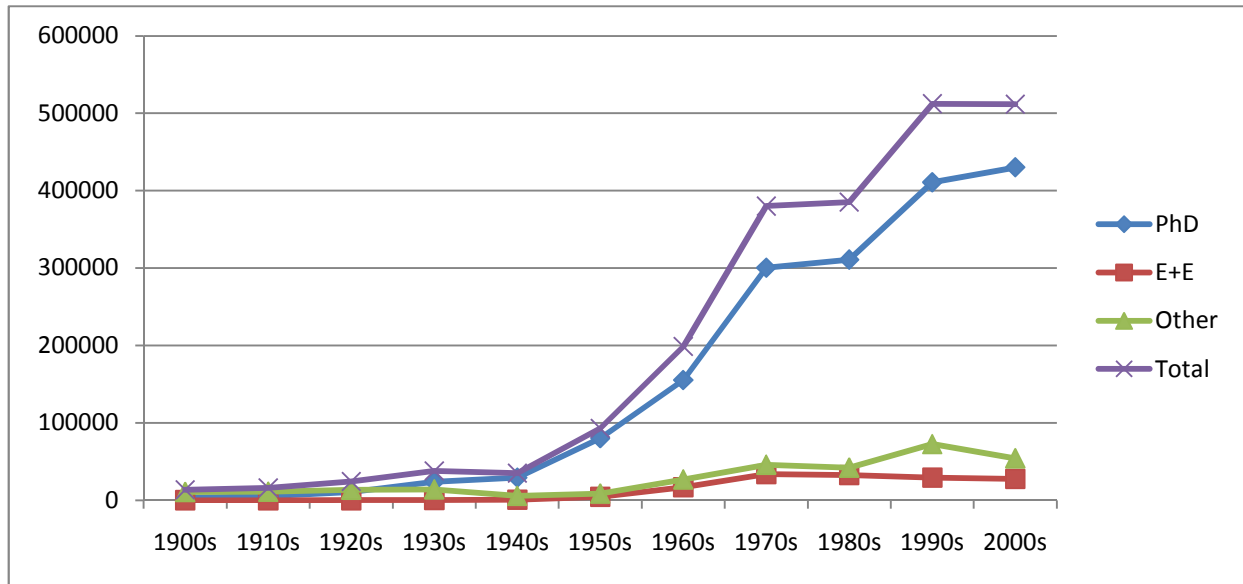


Figure 1. Number of Doctorates in the Last Century by Degree Title

Number of Ph.D.s With Subject Name/Code: Education

The number of Ph.D. doctoral degrees with the subject name/code identified to be ‘education’ as listed in the ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database is tabulated in Table C2 in Appendix C and shown graphically in Figure 2, and, similar to above, the Educat.D. and Ed.D. doctoral degrees are listed as Educat.D.+Ed.D. Please see the caveat section below. It can be seen that there were more Educat.D.+Ed.D. doctoral degrees than Ph.D. doctoral degrees with ‘education’ in the subject name/code category (PhDinEducation), in the decades of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. This should be contrasted with Cardozier (1987) who stated that the popularity of the Ed.D. increased until incidences of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. (in education) degrees awarded were equal by 1941, that the Ed.D. continued to be the dominant degree throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and the Ph.D. has been the dominant degree since the late 1970s.

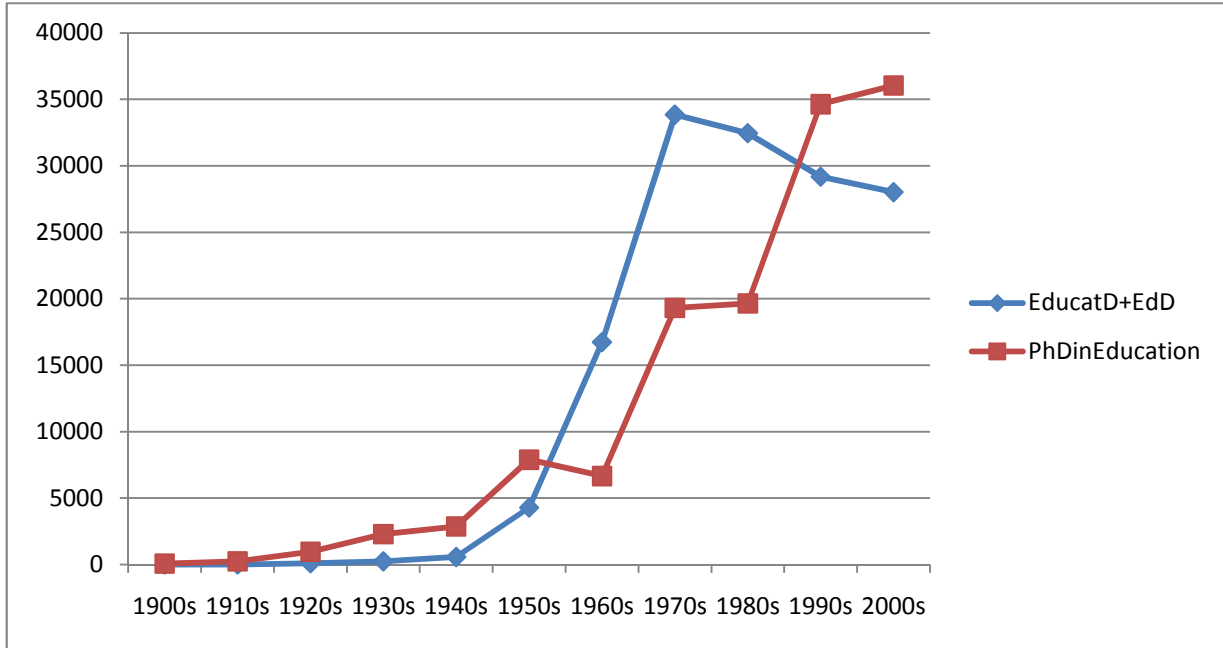


Figure 2. Number of Ph.D. Degrees With 'Education' in the Subject Name/Code Category

Number of Doctorates in the Last Two Decades

The number of doctoral degrees since 1990 listed in the ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database is tabulated in Table C3 in Appendix C and shown graphically in Figure 3. The degrees are identified by year from 1990 to the 2009. Please see the caveat section below. It is clear from this data that Ph.D. degrees have exceeded the number of any other degree type during the last 20 years and, in fact, more than the combined total of all non-Ph.D. doctoral degrees. There are several overlapping lines near the bottom of Figure 3 that are expanded in Figure 4.

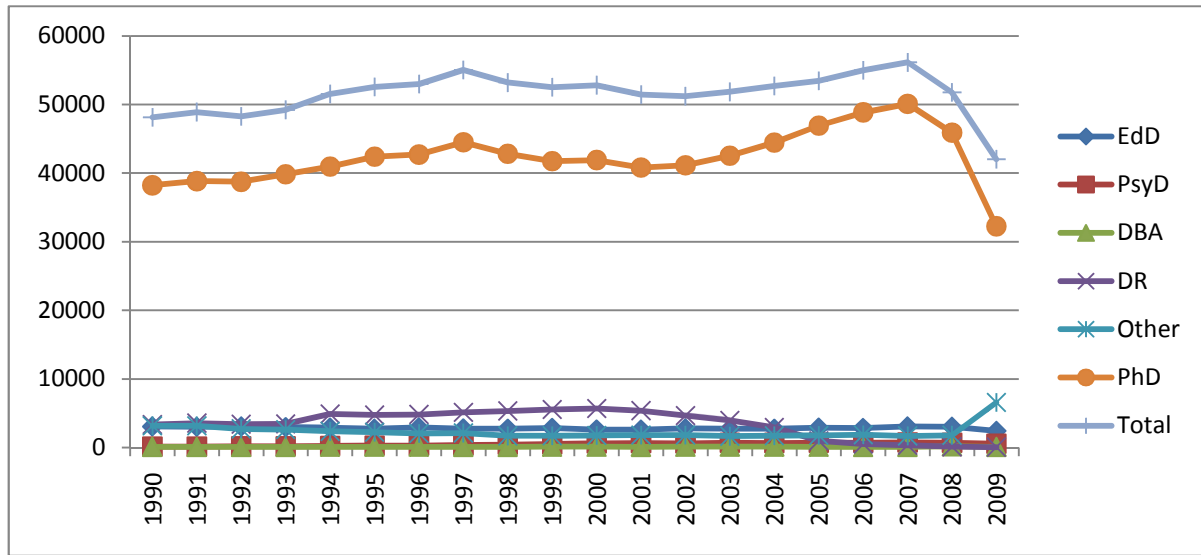


Figure 3. Number of Doctorates in the Last Two Decades by Degree Title

Figure 4 shows several trends (if one ignores 2009 due to incomplete data as described in the caveats listed below). The Ed.D. degrees have stayed relatively constant at about 3000 per year. The Psy.D. degrees have increased by a factor of four into the mid 700s per year. The D.B.A. degrees have been relatively steady in the 100 to 200 range per year. The Dr. degrees peaked in the 5000s per year around 2000 and have been declining rapidly. The category of other doctoral degrees (those that are not Ph.D., Ed.D., Psy.D., D.B.A. or Dr.) has declined by over a third in the last 20 years.

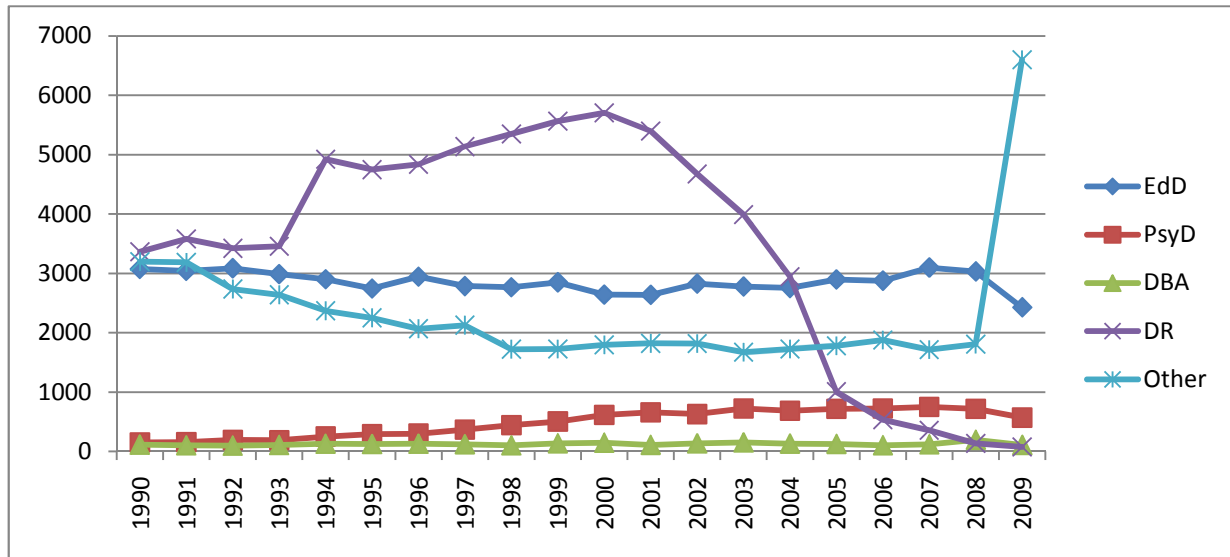


Figure 4. Expansion of Bottom Data Points of Figure 2.

Caveats

ProQuest does not claim to have every dissertation. The number of dissertations for 2008 and especially 2009 is probably not complete; the author has been using the ProQuest database for many years and has noticed that it does take time for universities and students to submit the completed dissertations. The year that the degree was awarded is occasionally not the year that is listed in the database. The two Educat.D. degrees in the 1910s were probably errors – the dissertation from 1917 was submitted to the data base in 1971 (sounds like a 17-to-71 dyslexia-typo); the other dissertation was dated 1919, but was added to the database in 1977. The author has found duplicates of the same dissertation and errors are found and corrected. The author selected the ‘dissertations only’ button, but there were master’s degrees that occasionally sneak in. In the unexplained area, the ‘other’ category had 277 doctorate degrees with the title ‘xx; in 1991 and 370 in 1992; they were all from Spain and the author did not check any other years.

Conclusions

The claim that the popularity of the Ed.D. increased until incidences of the Ed.D. and Ph.D. *in education* degrees awarded were equal by 1941 and that the Ed.D. continued to be the dominant degree throughout the 1950s and 1960s are not exactly supported by a review of ProQuest's *Dissertations and Theses* database. The Ph.D. has been the dominant degree since the Ed.D. was introduced in the 1920s by at least a factor of 8.87. However, there were more Ed.D. doctoral degrees than Ph.D. doctoral degrees with *education* in the subject name/code category, in the decades of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. There have been about 50,000 doctoral degrees awarded per year worldwide during the last 20 years (ProQuest's *Dissertations and Theses* database)! In response to the question entitling this paper; there have been 1,696,061 recorded by ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* Database between January 1, 1900 and December 31, 1999.

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Author's Biography



Leo A. Mallette, Ed.D. is a Supporting Faculty in the Decision Science discipline in the Graziadio School of Business and Management and a member of the Board of Visitors for the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. Previously, he worked in system engineering and project management of satellite systems at the Boeing Company

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Appendix A

Degrees Recognized as Being Equivalent to the Ph.D. by the National Science Foundation, in
Alphabetical Order (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b, para. 12)

1.	Doctor of Arts	(D.A.)
2.	Doctor of Applied Science	(D.A.S.)
3.	Doctor of Architecture	(D.Arch.)
4.	Doctor of Business Administration	(D.B.A.)
5.	Doctor of Canon Law	(J.C.D.)
6.	Doctor of Chemistry	(D.Chem.)
7.	Doctor of Comparative/Civil Law	(D.C.L.)
8.	Doctor of Criminal Justice	(D.C.J.)
9.	Doctor of Criminology	(D.Crim.)
10.	Doctor of Design	(Dr.DES.)
11.	Doctor of Education	(Ed.D.)
12.	Doctor of Environment	(D.Env.)
13.	Doctor of Environmental Design	(D.E.D.)
14.	Doctor of Engineering	(D.Eng.)
15.	Doctor of Engineering Science	(D.E.Sc./Sc.D.E.)
16.	Doctor of Fine Arts	(D.F.A.)
17.	Doctor of Forestry	(D.F.)
18.	Doctor of Geological Science	(D.G.S.)
19.	Doctor of Health and Safety	(D.H.S.)
20.	Doctor of Hebrew Literature/Letters	(D.H.L.)
21.	Doctor of Hebrew Studies	(D.H.S.)
22.	Doctor of Industrial Technology	(D.I.T.)
23.	Doctor of Juridical Science	(S.J.D.)
24.	Doctor of Juristic Science	(J.S.D.)
25.	Doctor of Library Science	(D.L.S.)
26.	Doctor of Medical Science	(D.M.Sc.)
27.	Doctor of Ministry	(D.Min./D.M.)
28.	Doctor of Modern Languages	(D.M.L.)
29.	Doctor of Music	(D.M.)
30.	Doctor of Musical Arts	(D.M.A.)
31.	Doctor of Musical Education	(D.M.E.)
32.	Doctor of Music Ministry	(D.M.M.)
33.	Doctor of Nursing Science	(D.N.Sc.)
34.	Doctor of Philosophy	(Ph.D.)
35.	Doctor of Physical Education	(D.P.E.)
36.	Doctor of Professional Studies	(D.P.S.)
37.	Doctor of Public Administration	(D.P.H.)
38.	Doctor of Public Health	(D.P.H.)
39.	Doctor of Recreation	(D.Rec./D.R.)
40.	Doctor of Rehabilitation	(Rh.D.)
41.	Doctor of Religious Education	(D.R.E.)

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| 42. | Doctor of Sacred Music | (D.S.M.) |
| 43. | Doctor of Sacred Theology | (S.T.D.) |
| 44. | Doctor of Science | (D.Sc./Sc.D.) |
| 45. | Doctor of Science and Hygiene | (D.Sc.H.) |
| 46. | Doctor of Science in Dentistry | (D.Sc.D.) |
| 47. | Doctor of Science in Veterinary Medicine | (D.Sc.V.M.) |
| 48. | Doctor of the Science of Law | (L.Sc.D.) |
| 49. | Doctor of Social Science | (D.S.Sc.) |
| 50. | Doctor of Social Work | (D.S.W.) |
| 51. | Doctor of Theology | (Th.D.) |

Appendix B
 Degrees Recognized as Being Equivalent to the Ph.D. by the National Science
 Foundation, in International Affairs Office, U.S. Department of Education, Feb 2008
 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

NOTE: This is the list of frequently awarded research doctorate degree titles accepted by the National Science Foundation (NSF) as representing degrees equivalent in content and level to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree.

1.	Doctor of Arts	(D.A.)
2.	Doctor of Business Administration	(D.B.A.)
3.	Doctor of Church Music	(D.C.M.)
4.	Doctor of Canon Law	(J.C.D./D.C.L.)
5.	Doctor of Design	(D.Des.)
6.	Doctor of Education	(Ed.D.)
7.	Doctor of Engineering	(D.Eng./D.E.Sc./D.E.S.)
8.	Doctor of Fine Arts	(D.F.A.)
9.	Doctor of Hebrew Letters	(D.H.L.)
10.	Doctor of Industrial Technology	(D.I.T.)
11.	Doctor of Juridical Science	(J.S.D./S.J.D.)
12.	Doctor of Music	(D.M.)
13.	Doctor of Musical/Music Arts	(D.M.A.)
14.	Doctor of Music Education	(D.M.E.)
15.	Doctor of Modern Languages	(D.M.L.)
16.	Doctor of Nursing Science	(D.N.Sc.)
17.	Doctor of Philosophy	(Ph.D.)
18.	Doctor of Public Administration	(D.P.A.)
19.	Doctor of Physical Education	(D.P.E.)
20.	Doctor of Public Health	(D.P.H.)
21.	Doctor of Sacred Theology	(S.T.D.)
22.	Doctor of Science	(D.Sc./Sc.D.)
23.	Doctor of Social Work	(D.S.W.)
24.	Doctor of Theology	(Th.D.)

Appendix C.
Tables Supporting Figures 1 to 3
(ProQuest, 2010)

Table C1. Number of Doctorates in the Last Century by Degree Title.

Decade	PhD	EdD	EducatD	E+E	Other	Total
1900s	3111	0	0	0	10452	13563
1910s	5056	0	2	2	10930	15988
1920s	10674	0	103	103	13493	24270
1930s	23653	22	217	239	14011	37903
1940s	29027	33	533	566	5534	35127
1950s	80133	131	4151	4282	8487	92902
1960s	155209	243	16489	16732	26726	198667
1970s	300379	79	33761	33840	45835	380054
1980s	310764	7104	25342	32446	42027	385237
1990s	410725	29176	2	29178	72447	512350
2000s	435173	28012	0	28012	55479	518664

Table C2. Number of Ph.D. Degrees With 'Education' in the Subject Name/Code Category.

Decade	E+E	PhD+Edu	Ratio
1900s	0	78	0.0
1910s	2	241	0.0
1920s	103	960	0.1
1930s	239	2288	0.1
1940s	566	2871	0.2
1950s	4282	7887	0.5
1960s	16732	6660	2.5
1970s	33840	19307	1.8
1980s	32446	19638	1.7
1990s	29178	34633	0.8
2000s	28012	36040	0.8

Data extracted from ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database on February 15, 2010 for 2009 and others (1900 to 2008) were extracted on December 29, 2009.

Table C3. Number of Doctorates in the Last Two Decades by Degree Title

Year	PhD	EdD	PsyD	DBA	DR	Other	Total
1990	38227	3073	153	115	3364	3198	48130
1991	38835	3041	159	103	3580	3185	48903
1992	38741	3085	194	100	3422	2737	48279
1993	39840	2987	192	110	3456	2640	49225
1994	40950	2901	252	130	4924	2370	51527
1995	42388	2745	292	125	4748	2252	52550
1996	42706	2943	301	130	4835	2068	52983
1997	44490	2786	370	123	5136	2128	55033
1998	42815	2766	444	104	5349	1723	53201
1999	41733	2849	505	139	5565	1728	52519
2000	41909	2642	616	148	5704	1796	52815
2001	40809	2638	660	112	5396	1821	51436
2002	41140	2826	630	136	4674	1817	51223
2003	42533	2778	723	151	3991	1672	51848
2004	44455	2754	688	134	2944	1725	52700
2005	46925	2896	720	128	1007	1779	53455
2006	48855	2877	723	106	536	1876	54973
2007	50092	3098	750	122	357	1714	56133
2008	45885	3031	717	198	136	1807	51774
2009	32252	2429	571	110	79	6599	42040

Data extracted from ProQuest *Dissertations and Theses* database on February 15, 2010 for 2009 and others (1990 to 2008) were extracted on December 29, 2009.