

Are Doctorates Really Needed For Non-Research Faculty Positions?

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For faculty positions that demand published research, the doctoral degree makes sense. But for positions which require no publication by faculty and which require faculty members to teach full-time, such a requirement seems counterproductive. In fact, hiring bright, energetic, faculty members with PhDs for solely teaching positions may, in fact, generate problems for the institution, the faculty members, and students.

The PHD is a research degree. Its function is to improve research skills. The doctorate has little to do with improving teaching skills or with widening a scholar's knowledge of one's chosen field.

In addition to the actual time, effort, and energy spent on the dissertation, doctoral candidates are acculturated into a research mentality. Academic researchers form a sub-culture; they share common values, a language all their own that often differs from university and college teaching faculty whose sole or chief function is teaching. Faculty with minimum research responsibilities work no less hard than their research oriented cousins; however, their schedules revolve around different fulcra. Teachers' time typically revolves around class preparations, test making, and grading, and advising while researchers' time typically orbits around manuscript production, submission, and revision tasks; conference paper preparation; and book writing and editing.

In addition to scheduling differences, research faculty work under a different dogma than do most teaching faculty. Part of the doctoral program mantra includes: (1) research activity is more important than teaching; (2) to be a good teacher, one must be at least an adequate researcher, and (3) research is the life blood of knowledge. Few complete a PHD program without believing in these claims, at least to some degree. Therefore, to hire a faculty member with a Ph.D. to teach where there are no research expectations and where there is no research interest camaraderie places that faculty member in a very dissonant situation.

Research trained faculty members hired for exclusively teaching jobs discover the fact that one of their highly honed skills is not cherished, not needed, and may wither unless they are able and willing to conduct research on their own time and with their own resources. Except for rare circumstances, such faculty members will see their salary remain on less than statistical par with colleagues elsewhere whose formal tasks include research duties -- an

eternal reminder that teaching is not as valuable as research at all institutions. Latent feelings of resentment or of inferiority may result for such faculty members.

This sword has a second edge, one that cuts just as sharp. Faculty at colleges who maintain their mission to be mainly or exclusively teaching appear to be victimized by a false set of advertising practices. Often, where there is a mix of doctorate holding and non doctorate possessing faculty, those with the terminal degrees invariably benefit in salary, promotion, sabbatical leave, and entry into administrative positions. Such a bias is not universal among institutions; however, it is indeed endemic throughout academia.

Where teaching is prominently valued, students would benefit more if faculty were sought who had earned multiple master's degrees (in related sub specialties of one's major field or in cognate fields) rather than in research oriented doctorates. Undergraduate students would benefit from classroom faculty members who possess broader and deeper teaching content exposure. Institutions could highlight and constructively brag about the well-rounded educators they have on their faculty. Advanced education for faculty could be retained as a mechanism for reward and advancement; however, this rewarded activity would be more specifically germane to one's professional duties.

Faculty who have wider academic backgrounds whose major duty and interests are in teaching are more likely better qualified than research oriented colleagues to propose, prepare, and teach interdisciplinary courses, a stated goal of many teaching emphasis schools. Too often, research interests detracts from class preparation dedication. Research demands frequently reduce the breadth of undergraduate course offerings by research faculty. Quite often, innovative courses are offered by and best taught by non-tenured, non terminal degreed instructors whose main duties are teaching.

I do not mean to suggest that a doctorate is an impediment to a teaching career or that preference ought be given to non-doctorate job candidates. But I believe that academic institutions should cease requiring the doctorate for positions where it is irrelevant. The "image" perception that a school with a high ratio of terminal degree holders is somehow more worthy is one that was promulgated by research institutions. It is the duty of teaching institutions to debunk that myth and replace it with a narrative extolling their excellence in teaching from non doctor-ate holding faculty. The doctorate is an excellent form of training; it has a purpose and specific function. Let's stop deifying and mysticizing the doctorate -- it's not the only path to righteousness!