

## Preferences for a Professional Doctorate in Philanthropy Program

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### Abstract

To date, there are 42 PhD programs (Mirabella, n.d.) within the United States in which people can focus on advancing knowledge in nonprofit management and/or philanthropic studies. Focusing on nonprofit and philanthropic studies in a PhD program involves students taking one to two nonprofit foundational courses at the master's degree level along with the rest of their doctoral level courses and then writing a dissertation in their desired subject area. However, most nonprofit-focused PhD programs involve earning the entire PhD in another subject area, such as public administration or political science. Only one program in the United States at Indiana University, Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI), allows students to pursue a PhD in philanthropic studies. However, because of the scarcity of research on doctoral level education in nonprofit and philanthropic studies, it is unknown if these PhD programs advance students for their intended careers in the academic or professional realm. Professional doctorates focused in philanthropy may be one option to advance students in their nonacademic careers. In this study, I report findings from a survey of 552 nonprofit and philanthropic professionals about their preferences for doctoral level education. Findings show that respondents wanted to pursue a professional doctorate rather than a PhD. For professional doctorate respondents, the traditional in-person classes incorporating case studies, discussion, and individual projects were the most preferable program format. Respondents also indicated that they would be like to be part-time doctoral students and commit 2 years to their doctoral studies. The final product that they would prefer to work on is an applied project or applied research. These findings suggest challenges and opportunities to implementing a professional doctorate program focused in nonprofit management and/or philanthropic studies.

**Keywords:** *nonprofit management education; nonprofit and philanthropy programs; doctoral studies*

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Nonprofit and philanthropic graduate education has grown significantly in the last 20 years (Allison et al., 2007; Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & McDonald, 2013). In fact, the number of nonprofit graduate concentrations increased from 17 in 1990 to 168 in 2011, and more growth is predicted in the next 10 to 20 years (Ebrahim, 2012; Mirabella, 2007; O'Neill, 2007). Nonprofit and philanthropic graduate programs are designed to equip pre- and mid-career specialists with knowledge and skills necessary for professional management of nonprofit organizations. Beyond the master's degree, approximately 42 schools in the United States offer PhD programs in which students can pursue an emphasis in nonprofit and philanthropic studies (Mirabella, n.d.). Focusing on nonprofit and philanthropic studies at the doctoral level usually means taking some foundational nonprofit courses at the master's level along with doctoral level courses and then writing a nonprofit-focused dissertation (Jackson, Guerrero, & Appe, 2014).

Although there has been some increase in doctoral level core courses offered in nonprofit and philanthropic studies in the past few years, there is no consistency in what topics are covered in these courses, and in many instances these courses do not provide the doctoral level nonprofit theory (Allison et al., 2007; Jackson et al., 2014). In addition, the field is growing in the number of dissertations and knowledge produced, but some dissertations appear to be in topics not introduced or covered within courses in nonprofit-focused doctoral programs, such as nonprofit organizational development or the external environment in which nonprofit organizations operate (Shier & Handy, 2014). Many students who pursue nonprofit and philanthropic doctoral level education have indicated that they are primarily self-directed learners (Jackson et al., 2014), and it is still unknown if PhD programs focused on nonprofit and philanthropic studies advance students for their intended careers in the academic or professional realm.

Studies show that doctoral completion rates vary by discipline; more specifically, the social sciences have 55% doctoral degree program completion rates (Dencke & Frasier, 2005) and, according to the Council of Graduate Schools, "70% of USA doctoral graduates work outside of the academy" (as cited in Halse & Mowbray, 2011, p. 518). In addition, "in recent years there has been a recognition that the majority of Ph.D. students neither follow, nor intend to follow an academic career" (Costley & Lester, 2012, p. 257). Because it is unknown to what extent nonprofit and philanthropic-focused PhD programs prepare students for their intended careers either in the academic or in the professional realm, and because research shows many PhD students do not follow an academic career, in this paper I discuss the option of a professional doctorate degree focused in nonprofit and philanthropic studies as a way to advance students in their professional careers.

A professional doctorate degree is different than a PhD. A PhD prepares students to contribute to knowledge and research and for a career in the academy, whereas a professional doctorate degree prepares students to advance practice. The first professional doctorate of its kind, in medicine (MD), was offered at Harvard in 1921 (Servage, 2009). Since that time professional doctorates have been created and have become well known and respected in many industries, such as dentistry, business, public administration, law, and education.

At the moment no professional doctorate programs are focused on nonprofit or philanthropic studies in the United States. Professional doctorates focused in nonprofit management and philanthropy may be one option to prepare students for their intend-

ed professional careers. In addition, because research about nonprofit-focused doctoral programs is scarce, and because access to doctoral level educational opportunities that provide in-depth focus on philanthropy and third sector theory and practice is scarcer, it is important to determine the preferences for such a degree.

Therefore, I will report findings from a national survey of 552 nonprofit and philanthropic professionals about their preferences for nonprofit-focused doctoral level education as well as about the characteristics and factors that are wanted in such a degree. This paper is important because it shows there are preferences for a professional doctorate in philanthropic and nonprofit studies, and it assists in designing professional doctorate pedagogy so working professionals can participate. Before the methods are discussed, I will delve deeper into defining professional doctorates as well as nonprofit and philanthropic doctoral education.

## Review of Literature

The review of literature will provide an overview of the definition of a professional doctorate, the number and type of professional doctorate degrees offered, and an overview of nonprofit management education.

### Professional Doctorate Degrees

It is challenging to come up with an agreed upon definition of the professional doctorate degree because the degree varies across each discipline. However, most scholars agree that a professional doctorate degree is not a PhD and it is work beyond a master's degree. Although most professional doctorate degrees are different from one another, the Council of Graduate Schools<sup>1</sup> (2007) states,

Professional Doctorates in general have three core characteristics; the Professional Doctorate:

1. addresses an area of professional practice where other degrees are not currently meeting all employer needs.
2. emphasizes applied or clinical research or advanced practice.
3. includes in its ranks the leaders of the profession who will drive the creative and knowledge based development of its practices and the development of standards for others. (p. 7)

The number, scope, and type of professional doctorate programs have evolved significantly since the first professional doctorate was awarded in 1921. The general focus and purpose of professional doctorates have evolved as well. The first juris doctorate and doctorate of medicine degrees were aimed at providing candidates with pre-service knowledge and skills necessary for entry level in the professions. Today, many professional doctorates are considered an alternative to a PhD and are offered for mid-career working professionals to pursue with the purpose of professional development and career advancement (O'Connor, 2011).

Although professional doctorate degrees vary in program length beyond the master's degree, they generally offer 32–48 hours of coursework, are longer than a traditional master's degree, and offer a dissertation or final project rooted in improving a specific field of practice for the culminating experience of the degree program (Council

<sup>1</sup>CGS is the only national organization in the United States dedicated solely to the advancement of graduate education and research. <http://cgsnet.org/about-cgs>

of Graduate Schools, 2007). The professional doctorate degree aims to provide students with more expert-level knowledge and practice-based experience beyond a master's degree.

Professional doctorate degrees are well known and respected within the United Kingdom and Australia, but they are less respected in the United States. In 2008, 3,000 professional doctorate degrees were awarded within the United States across a variety of disciplines. Although 3,000 seems like a large number, professional doctorates make up only 6% of total earned doctorates within the United States (O'Connor, 2011), whereas approximately 7,800 professional doctorate degrees were awarded in the United Kingdom in 2009 (Brown & Cooke, 2010).

Surveys and interviews of students, alums, and organizations show that professional doctorate programs are beneficial to the students enrolled, the organizations where the students are employed, and the professions where the doctorates are housed (Halse & Mowbray, 2011; Kumar, 2014). Students report they grow professionally, increase their responsibilities and level of expertise in their organizations, and advance the practice of their professions (Kumar, 2014). Even with these reported benefits, there are some challenges of developing and managing professional doctorate programs, especially within the United States, where these programs are less known and less respected. Most of the challenges developing and running professional doctorate programs within the United States stem from deep-seated cultural assumptions and perceptions of (research-based) doctoral level education by faculty and administrators.

Because the professional doctorate is different from the PhD, it takes some time for faculty and administrators to understand (and accept) the many differences of these two degrees. First, there are often different qualifications of faculty who teach in professional doctorate degree programs. Professional doctorate candidates receive mentoring and instruction from experts in professional practice who tend to be outside of the traditional walls of the academy. Second, most professional doctorate degrees are offered in a nontraditional classroom format (e.g., hybrid, online, night classes, and part time) to meet the needs of the working student. Third, the length of time of the doctoral degree program tends to be shorter than a PhD but longer than a master's degree. Fourth, the culminating experience for the professional doctorate is often a professional practice project, but can be a dissertation. Fifth, students tend to have different expectations of professional development and come into professional doctorate programs with higher levels of professional experiences and expertise (Bourner & Simpson, 2014; Council of Graduate Schools, 2007).

It is also important that faculty and administrators understand that professional doctorate degrees are different from master's degrees. The Council of Graduate Schools (2007) stated, "Professional Doctorate degrees are not—and cannot be re-titled master's degrees. Like a Ph.D., a professional doctorate clearly demarks a standard of achievement higher than that of degrees that precede it" (p. 6). The higher standard of achievement should represent preparation of "potential transformation of that field of professional practice" (p. 6). Those who create and manage professional doctorate programs must differentiate their program and areas of study of practice beyond the master's degree.

## Nonprofit Management Doctoral Level Education

Although nonprofit master's degree programs have grown significantly in the last 20 years (Allison et al., 2007; Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & McDonald, 2013), it is unknown how quickly or how robustly nonprofit-focused PhDs have grown. Scholars have attempted to track the growth by counting the number of dissertations and articles published focused on nonprofit and philanthropic studies (Jackson et al., 2014; Shier & Handy, 2014). However, out of the 42 programs listed on Seton Hall University's nonprofit management educational offerings website (Mirabella, n.d.), it is unknown how each program is preparing students for their intended career paths.

Previous research on nonprofit-focused doctoral programs shows a disconnect between the demand for nonprofit doctoral education and supply provided (Allison et al., 2007). The disconnect stems from doctoral students wanting more doctoral level foundational courses, nonprofit faculty to study and conduct research under, and doctoral level consortiums, but few universities provide nonprofit-specific resources and support at the doctoral level. In a recent study, Shier and Handy (2014) found that although there has been some increase in doctoral level core courses in nonprofit and philanthropic studies, there is no consistency in what topics are covered in these courses. In addition, some students write nonprofit-focused dissertations on topics, such as organizational development, that are not covered in their graduate level courses. Students who pursue nonprofit and philanthropic doctoral level education have indicated that they are primarily self-directed learners (Jackson et al., 2014). Based on what is missing in the literature, it was important to survey nonprofit and philanthropic professionals about their preferences for doctoral education.

### Research Design and Method

Survey monkey was used to construct and administer the online survey. Survey participants were recruited through a snowball sample method (Goodman, 1961) from umbrella or infrastructure nonprofit and philanthropic organizations that were in my LinkedIn network. The infrastructure organizations included CompassPoint, the Council on Foundations, the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy, the Institute for Nonprofit Education and Research at the University of San Diego, and Public Allies. Because some of the infrastructure organizations had strong privacy policies and did not feel comfortable providing how many people were on their lists, it is unknown how many people received the survey invitation. Survey notifications were sent in August and September 2013 and then in January and February 2014.

The survey included 31 questions, with a mix of Likert scale items, open-ended comments, and demographic information. Twelve of the 31 survey questions, which are included in the Appendix, asked about respondents doctoral educational preferences. As with all surveys, there were some limitations with the data collection process, and there could have been selection bias because the survey was distributed through my professional network. Additionally, the organizations that distributed the survey ranged in size, location within the United States, and type of infrastructure (e.g., academic center, membership organization, management support organization, emerging

leader training program). Moreover, respondents ranged in age, gender, years of experience, and type of organization.

Once the data were collected, they were imported into SPSS (version 20) and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, correlations were run to determine if there were relationships between certain professional development preferences and/or activities and demographic characteristics of members. Chi-square tests of significance were also conducted comparing PhD respondents and professional doctorate respondents. The  $p$  values that had statistically significant results (i.e.,  $p < .05$ ) were then reported.

In total, 552 nonprofit and philanthropic professionals completed the entire survey. The majority of respondents were directly involved in the nonprofit or philanthropic sector as employees (475), board members (117), and volunteers (78), as well as consultants (53) and researchers (14).

Survey respondents possessed the following demographic characteristics:

- 28% of respondents represented the age group of under 30; the second largest was the age group of 40–49 years (24%), then 50–59 years (23%) and 30–39 years (20%).
- 74% of respondents were female.
- 449 of respondents were Caucasian/White, Hispanic/Latino (36), African American/Black (23), Asian (16), Multiracial (13), American Indian or Alaska Native (11; raw numbers included).
- Although respondents came from a variety of states across the United States, the largest numbers of responses were from California (28%) and Michigan (17%).

The demographics of the survey respondents were fairly representative of the demographics of the sector as a whole; for example, women make up 67% of the nonprofit workforce and Whites are 83% of the nonprofit workforce (Leete, 2006).

## Findings

To gain an understanding about the preferences of doctoral level education, respondents were provided the definition of a PhD program and a professional doctorate program and answered survey questions based on those definitions. They answered questions that focused on interest in doctoral level education, doctoral content and length preferences, and factors that influence their decision to pursue doctoral level study. The findings are provided for all respondents interested in doctoral level education and then compared between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate degree.

### Interest and Demographic Characteristics of Those Who Pursue Doctoral Level Education

Respondents indicated their level of interest in doctoral level education and which doctoral degree program best matched their career aspirations (using the definitions provided). Respondents were provided the question, are you interested in a doctoral level education (PhD or professional doctorate)? Twenty-three percent (121) of the survey respondents were interested in doctoral level education. They were then pro-

vided the following statement, which included a definition of a PhD and a professional doctorate degree focused on nonprofit and/or philanthropic studies: Select the doctoral degree that best matches with your career aspirations.

- PhD with a nonprofit and/or philanthropic focus – a dissertation-based terminal academic degree that is used to prepare you for academia, teaching, and/or research-focused career.
- Professional doctorate degree with a nonprofit and/or philanthropic focus – a post-master's degree that combines workplace and professional engagement with academic experience that is used to prepare you for professional development/career growth in the nonprofit/philanthropic sector.
- Other.

Seventy-two percent (99) of those interested in doctoral level education indicated a professional doctorate degree best matched their career aspirations, 16% (22) said a PhD degree best matched their career aspirations, and 12% (16) indicated other.

In a comparison by demographic characteristics of respondents who selected a PhD and professional doctorate, 65% of PhD respondents and 69% of professional doctorate respondents had previously earned a master's degree. The largest age group of those wanting to pursue a professional doctorate was 30–39 years (33%). The second largest age group was 40–49 years (28%).

### Doctoral Content and Length Preferences

Respondents answered questions about their preferable program format, learning activities, length, topics/subjects, and final product of a doctorate level program. I believe that this information will be helpful in designing pedagogy to meet the learning needs of students and structuring doctoral programs to working professionals.

**Program format preferences (Appendix: Question 3).** Respondents indicated their preferred format of doctoral education by selecting *prefer*, *not prefer*, or *depends on program* for a variety of program formats, which are listed in Table 1. They could select more than one program format option. Sixty-one percent of respondents preferred in-person classes with a cohort format (a group of students that take all classes together). Additionally, 52% of respondents preferred summer intensive programs (short-term classes that run 1–3 weeks over each summer). The least preferable format was in-person classes on their own in a non-cohort format, with 25% of respondents preferring this learning format.

Further analysis was conducted to compare the program format preferences between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. The results are shown in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, there were significant differences in distance learning and hybrid course program format preferences between PhD respondents and professional doctorate respondents.



**Table 1***Doctoral Level Program Format Preferences*

Format	% of PhD respondents	% of professional doctorate respondents	Sig.
Take in-person classes with a cohort (a group of students that take all classes together)	70	59	
Summer intensive program (short-term classes that run 1–3 weeks over each summer)	39	55	
Take in-person classes on my own in a non-cohort format	35	25	
Distance learning (online classes)	17	33	*
Hybrid courses (held partially in class and online)	22	44	*

\* $p < .05$ .

**Learning activities preferences (Appendix: Question 4).** Survey respondents were then asked to indicate their preferences (*prefer, not prefer, or depends on the class*) for a variety of learning activities during their doctoral program. The most preferred learning activity was discussion (78%). Other preferred learning activities were case study/analysis (76%), individual projects (73%), and independent study/research (59%).

It is worth mentioning that group project assignments were a least preferable activity, with 32% preference. Further analysis was conducted to compare the preferred learning activities between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate and showed a significant difference in the group project assignment learning activity preference between the two groups.

**Length of study preferences (Appendix: Question 5).** Respondents preferred length of study at the doctoral level was 3 years (39%) or 2 years (38%) as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2***Preferred Length of Study of Doctoral Program*

Length of study	% of respondents
1 year	6
2 years	38
3 years	39
4 years	12
5 years	5
6 years	1



Further analysis revealed 22% of PhD respondents and 44% of professional doctorate respondents preferred to complete their program in 2 years, and 48% of PhD respondents and 36% of professional doctorate respondents preferred to complete their program in 3 years.

**Topics/subjects preferences (Appendix: Question 11).** Respondents indicated their level of interest in specific topics in their doctoral program.<sup>2</sup> The most popular topics were program, organizational, and strategic planning and management (75%), leadership (72%); governance (60%); evaluation (53%); and advocacy, public policy, and social change (52%). Further analysis was conducted to compare the interested learning topics between those who wanted to pursue a Ph.D. and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. There were significant differences in topic/subject interests between PhD respondents and professional doctorate respondents for the evaluation category.

**Final product preferences (Appendix: Question 13).** Respondents selected the final product they would prefer to work on during their doctoral program. They could select more than one option. The majority of professional doctorate respondents (79%) wanted to work on an applied project as a final product of their study. Another popular option for professional doctorate respondents was applied research (52%). However, the majority of PhD respondents (74%) preferred to work on a scientific research or thesis as a final program of their doctoral studies, and 60.9% preferred publication(s). There were significant differences in the final product choices between PhD and professional doctorate respondents for the thesis and applied project categories.

### Factors Influencing Participants' Decisions for Doctoral Level Study

Respondents were asked questions about what factors influence their decision for doctorate level study. These questions included choice of university, time commitment, and the type of student respondents would like to be during their doctoral program.

**Choice of university (Appendix: Question 8).** Respondents rated the factors that would *strongly influence*, *somewhat influence*, or *not influence* their choice of university to pursue a doctoral degree. The results are shown in Table 3. The most influential factors were relevance of the program content to their professional needs (97%), quality of instruction (93%), cost of the program (79%), distance to residence/work area (75%), and quality of students (68%).

**Table 3**

*Factors That Influence Choice of University*

Influencing factors	Strongly influence (%)	Somewhat influence (%)	Not influence (%)
Name/image of the university	52	45	3
Relevance of the program content to your professional needs	97	3	0
Cost of the program	79	17	4

<sup>2</sup>Topics were determined by a previous meta-analysis of the literature conducted by the author on nonprofit management competencies. The piece is under review in the *Journal of Nonprofit Management and Leadership*.

**Table 3 (cont.)**

<b>Influencing factors</b>	<b>Strongly influence (%)</b>	<b>Somewhat influence (%)</b>	<b>Not influence (%)</b>
Distance to your residence/work area	75	20	5
Opportunity to have classes on weekdays	44	40	16
Opportunity to have classes on weekends	47	36	17
Availability of hybrid and/or online classes	45	35	20
Quality of instruction	93	6	1
Quality of students	68	26	6
Availability of grantmaking track	33	28	39
Availability of nonprofit management track	50	29	21

Further analysis was conducted to compare the factors that influence choice of university between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. Although there were not any significant differences between professional doctorate and PhD respondents, the overwhelming majority from both subgroups indicated that relevance of the program content to professional needs and quality of instruction were factors that would strongly influence their choice of university. What is interesting is that 80% of professional doctorate respondents stated the cost of the program strongly influenced their choice of university, whereas 64% of PhD respondents indicated this factor influenced their choice. For PhD respondents, the distance between the university and their residence/work area was more influential (86%).

**Time commitment – In-person class (Appendix: Question 6).** The majority of respondents (88%) stated they would be able to commit up to 10 hr/week in class to their doctoral level study. Further analysis was conducted to compare the time commitment – in-person class between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. Among those who wanted to pursue a PhD program, 70% would be able to commit 5–10 hr/week, and 22% would be able to commit less than 5 hr/week to their doctoral program. Professional doctorate respondents appeared to be more constrained in terms of time because most of them (48%) indicated they would be able to commit less than 5 hr/week to their doctoral level study, and 42% would be able to commit 5–10 hr/week.

**Time commitment – Outside of class (Appendix: Question 7).** Many of the respondents (45%) would be able to commit 5–10 hr/week outside of class time to their doctoral studies. Twenty-seven percent would be able to commit 11–15 hr/week. Further analysis was conducted to compare the time commitment – outside of class between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a profes-

sional doctorate. Forty-seven percent of professional doctorate respondents would be able to commit 5–10 hr/week outside of class time, and 24% would be able to commit 11–15 hr/week outside of class time. PhD respondents indicated they would be able to commit more time. Thirty-nine percent would be able to commit 11–15 hr/week, and 39% would be able to commit 5–10 hr/week outside of class time to their doctoral level study.

**Commute time (Appendix: Question 9).** The majority of respondents (70%) indicated they would be willing to travel up to 60 min/week in pursuit of their doctoral degree. Further analysis was conducted to compare the commute time between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Minutes Traveled Per Week to Pursue Doctoral Degree*

Minutes per week	% of PhD respondents	% of professional doctorate respondents
0–30 min	38	25
31–60 min	43	41
61–90 min	10	17
Over 90 min	10	17

Eighty-one percent of PhD respondents and 66% of professional doctorate respondents would be willing to spend up to 60 min for commuting.

**Type of student (Appendix: Question 10).** Respondents indicated what type of students they would like to be during their doctoral level study. The majority of respondents (62%) would prefer to be part-time doctoral students and full-time employees in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. Further analysis was conducted to compare the type of student preferences between those who wanted to pursue a PhD and those who wanted to pursue a professional doctorate. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Type of Student During Doctoral Degree*

Type of student	% of PhD respondents	% of professional doctorate respondents
Full-time doctoral student with assistantship or fellowship with the university	27	9
Full-time doctoral student without assistantship or fellowship with the university	5	1

**Table 5 (cont.)**

Type of student	% of PhD respondents	% of professional doctorate respondents
Part-time doctoral student and a full-time employee in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector	55	67
Part-time doctoral student and a part-time employee in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector	5	7
Haven't considered what type of student I would be yet	9	14
Other	0	1

*Note.* No significant relationships were found.

As the table shows, more PhD respondents than professional doctorate respondents prefer to be full-time doctoral students.

## Discussion and Limitations

Findings show that more nonprofit and philanthropic professionals would like to pursue a professional doctorate rather than a PhD. For professional doctorate respondents, the traditional in-person classes incorporating case studies, discussion, and individual projects remain the most preferable program format, and they would be able to commit 2–3 years to their doctoral studies. The final product that the majority of professional doctorate respondents would prefer to work on is an applied project or applied research.

The factors that most influence respondents' choice of university are the relevance of the content to their professional needs, the quality of instruction, and the cost of the program. Participants would be ready to spend up to 5 hr/week of in-class time and up to 10 hr/week of outside-the-class time on the doctoral studies. In addition, they would be willing to spend up to 60 min/week on the commute. The majority of participants would prefer to be part-time doctoral students and full-time employees in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector during their doctoral studies.

The findings for the most part are consistent with the literature indicating professional doctorate programs are different from PhD programs (Bourner & Simpson, 2014; Council of Graduate Schools, 2007; O'Connor, 2011). The professional doctorate respondents preferred a shorter practice-focused doctoral program with an applied final product. The findings also bring up some concern over many professional doctorate respondents' expectations of earning their doctoral level education in a short time frame (of 2 years) and with limited time to devote to studying outside of class time (10 hr/week), even though respondents received the professional doctorate degree definition, which indicated it is a post-master's degree. More research would need to be conducted to determine why the majority of respondents' expectations of program

length are incongruent with the actual length it would take to complete a professional doctorate degree program.

The topics that professional doctorate respondents want to study (e.g., leadership, governance, strategic planning, and evaluation) are in alignment with current master's degree course topics (Mirabella & McDonald, 2013). However, considering the majority of respondents previously earned their master's degrees, doctoral level courses would need to be at a higher level and delve deeper into an area of practice. Additionally, professional doctorate programs would need to provide many more non-profit and philanthropic foundational courses, something that has been a previous concern of nonprofit and philanthropic PhD students (Allison et al., 2007; Jackson et al., 2014). Moreover, programs would need to provide support mechanisms for students enrolled in such programs.

Several findings were inconsistent with the literature. The professional doctorate respondents' lack of interest in group work is disconcerting. The literature emphasizes group work as being a key component of professional doctorate programs (Council of Graduate Schools, 2007). However, the majority of professional doctorate respondents (80%) preferred case study analysis and discussion as close second (76%). It might be assumed that because survey respondents are busy working professionals, they are hesitant about the time commitment involved with group work.

Although this study is a step forward to understanding nonprofit and philanthropic professionals' preference for doctoral level education, the study has limitations. First, the study is a subset of those involved in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations across the United States and is not representative of the millions of people involved in the sector as a whole. The data cannot be used to generalize preferences for nonprofit doctorate education. Second, the study topics are broad, and future studies should unpack the topics in a more specific manner. For example, the advocacy, public policy, and social change study topic should be split apart to determine more specific topic preferences for doctoral education. Last, as described in the Research Design and Method section, there could be some bias among survey respondents. For example, those who were interested in doctoral education, therefore, completed the survey. I attempted to minimize response bias by distributing the survey through a variety of national infrastructure organizations. Even with these limitations, infrastructure organizations as well as universities could potentially use this data to inform pedagogical discussions in nonprofit and philanthropic doctoral level education.

Those who proceed with creating a professional doctorate program in nonprofit management and philanthropy need to be cautious of how the degree will be perceived by university faculty and administrators. Therefore, all involved in the creation of the degree should be provided the *Task Force Report on the Professional Doctorate* developed by the Council on Graduate Schools (2007). Once task force members read the guide, there will be greater understanding moving forward in creating such a degree.

Future studies can delve further into the curriculum offerings at the 42 nonprofit-focused doctoral programs across the United States and survey alumni career paths. In the meantime, this study can help inform those who direct nonprofit-focused PhD programs as well as professionals in the field of philanthropy and nonprofit management about the professional development and higher education preferences of nonprofit and philanthropic professionals.

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## Appendix

### Survey Questions

1. Are you interested in a doctoral level education (PhD or Professional Doctorate)?  
Y/N
2. Select the doctoral degree that best matches with your career aspirations. Please answer the rest of the questions in this section with your preferred doctoral degree you select.
  - a. PhD degree with a nonprofit and/or philanthropic focus on a dissertation-based terminal academic degree that is used to prepare you for academia, teaching, and/or research-focused career.
  - b. Professional doctorate degree with a nonprofit and/or philanthropic focus that combines workplace and professional engagement with academic experience that is used to prepare you for professional development/career growth in the nonprofit/philanthropic sector.
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please indicate your preference for the format of doctoral education:

Format	Prefer	Not prefer	Depends on program
Take in-person classes with a cohort (a cohort is a group of students that take all classes together)			
Take in-person classes on my own in a non-cohort format			
Summer intensive program (short-term classes that run 1–3 weeks over each summer)			
Distance learning (online classes)			
Hybrid courses (held partially in class and online)			
Other _____			

4. Please rate your preference for the types of learning activities at the doctoral level:

Learning activity	Prefer	Not prefer	Depends on the class
Independent study courses			
Discussion			
In-class group work			
Group project assignments			
Individual project			
Case study/analysis			
In-class exercises			
Self-directed research			
Interactive methods (simulations, role playing, etc.)			
Other _____			

5. What is your preferred length of a doctoral program? \_\_\_\_\_ years (a drop-down menu)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

6. How many hours per week of IN-PERSON class time would you be able to commit to your doctoral level study? (Check one)

- Less than 5 hours
- 5–10 hours
- 11–15 hours
- 16–20 hours
- More than 20 hours

7. How many hours per week OUTSIDE OF class time you would be able to commit to doctoral level study? (Check one)

- Less than 5 hours
- 5–10 hours
- 11–15 hours
- 16–20 hours
- More than 20 hours

8. Please indicate how the following factors would influence your choice of the university from which you would like to obtain your doctoral degree:

Factor	Strongly influence	Somewhat influence	Not influence
Name/image of the university			
Relevance of the program content to your professional needs			
Cost of the program			
Distance to your residence/work area			
Opportunity to have classes on weekdays			
Opportunity to have classes on weekends			
Availability of hybrid and/or online classes			
Availability of financial aid			
Other _____			

9. Regardless of cost, how many total round-trip miles are you willing to travel per day in pursuit of your doctoral degree?
- 0–25 miles
  - 26–50 miles
  - 51–75 miles
  - 76–100 miles
  - 100+ miles
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. What type of student would you like to be in your doctoral program? (select one)
- Full-time doctoral student with assistantship or fellowship with the university
  - Full-time doctoral student without assistantship or fellowship with the university
  - Full-time doctoral student and part-time employee in the nonprofit sector
  - Part-time doctoral student and full-time employee in the nonprofit sector
  - Part-time doctoral student and part-time employee in the nonprofit sector
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. Please indicate your level of interest in the following topics in your doctorate program? (Interested, Neutral, Not Interested)

Topic	Interested	Somewhat interested	Not interested
Advocacy, Public Policy, Social Change			
Communications, Marketing, and Public Relations			
Collaboration and Community Building			
Direct Service			
Donor Engagement			
Evaluation			
Financial Management			
Fundraising			
Governance			
Grantmaking			
Human Resource Management			
Information Management			
Investment Practices			
Legal and Regulatory			
Nonprofit, Philanthropy, History, and Ethics			
Leadership			
Program, Organizational, and Strategic Planning and Management			
Social Entrepreneurship			
Volunteerism			
Other _____			

12. What final product would you prefer to work on at your doctorate program?

(check all that apply)

- Scientific research or thesis
- Applied research
- Applied project
- Publication(s)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

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