

ASSESSING THE VALUE OF A PA ENTRY-LEVEL DOCTORATE DEGREE

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DISCLOSURES

- No relevant commercial relationships to disclose.

OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

- Describe the average length and tuition for postgraduate PA doctoral programs and for a projected model for PA entry-level doctoral education.
- Discuss some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of entry-level PA doctoral education.

BACKGROUND

- 2000: Master's degree adopted as entry-level
- 2009: Clinical Doctoral Summit reaffirms Master's degree
- Now: Growth of post-PA doctoral programs [DHS(c), DMS(c) & others]

PURPOSE

Primary aim:

- Compare the length & cost of post-PA doctoral degrees to the estimated length & cost of an entry-level PA doctorate.

Secondary aim

- Investigate the potential relationship between PA leadership & having a doctorate

METHODS

- **To determine typical tuition, credit hrs, & time to completion for post-PA doctoral programs:**
 - Data initially extracted from 10 PAEA-member post-PA doctoral program websites – expanded to 15
- **To inform development of a probable model for a PA entry-level doctorate, we assessed:**
 - Historical Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) Annual Program Survey data
 - A custom analysis from PAEA comparing bachelor & master's PA programs (tuition & length)
 - Publicly available data from the NP, OT, & PT professions

METHODS CONT'D

- **To identify any relationship between having a doctoral degree and holding a leadership position:**
 - Data from the 2019 American Academy of PAs (AAPA) Practice Survey were examined
 - Analyses: descriptive statistics, chi-square tests of independence, calculation of Pearson's correlation coefficients to assess for potential relationships between survey items

RESULTS

	Post-PA Doctoral Programs	Projected Entry-Level Doctorate
Credits	$M = 42.5$ ($SD = 10.84$) (21-61)	12-18 more than master's degree ^a
Length/time	2.5 to 3 yrs. part-time at 3-6 credits (1-2 courses)/semester (8+ academic terms)*	2-4 mos. (1 semester/academic term)
Cost	mean tuition = \$35,351 ($SD = \$9,131$) (\$18,000 - \$47,040) Fees add an ave. \$1,200	\$7,164 to \$12,969 tuition <i>added</i> to the cost of PA master's program

^aPA master's degree = 108.6 credits (54-154); projected PA entry-level doctorate = 123.6 (69-169)
 For comparison, OTD = 88-131 credits;¹ DPT = ave. 118 credits (90-185)²
^b1 yr if fulltime at 12-18 credits/semester (2-3 academic terms)

RESULTS

PA Leadership & Having a Doctorate

- **2019 AAPA Practice Survey** distributed 4 times during the year:
 - 4,301 (of 37,406) responded, overall response rate of 11.5%
 - 1,695 responses from a convenience sample at AAPA annual conference
- **3.9%** reported **having a doctorate** (171/4296)
 - 25.1% had PhDs, 54.4% had DHSc or DMSc
- **48.4%** reported being in a **leadership role** (2,081/4,298)
- **Min. correlation between having a doctorate & a formal leadership role,**
 $r = .13, n = 4298, p < .01.$
- No correlation between interest in leadership & intent to pursue doctorate
- **Min. correlation between interest in education & intent to pursue doctorate,**
 $r = .14, n = 292, p = .01.$

LIMITATIONS

- Inconsistent information on websites and changes in APAP/PAEA surveys over time limited ability to directly compare some data points
- Assessment focused solely on length & cost and on professional doctorates (no evaluation of academic doctorates, e.g. EdD, PhD)
- Information obtained from other health professions consisted primarily of publicly available data (may be incomplete)
- Projected length & tuition of an entry-level PA doctoral program represents an estimate

DISCUSSION

- National survey of PA students: more than half (55.5%) preferred obtaining clinical doctorate if the added length ≤ 12 months⁴
- $\approx 16\%$ of recently certified PAs plan to pursue additional training or education⁵
- Strong enrollment in post-PA doctoral programs suggests demand*
- A PA entry-level doctoral degree:
 - Financial & chronological advantages compared to post-PA doctoral programs (*content likely to differ)
 - *May* offer more opportunities in education & for leadership*
- A PA entry-level doctoral degree may:
 - Negatively impact diversity (other professions with mixed association)^{6,7,8}
 - Challenge faculty recruitment & retention

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