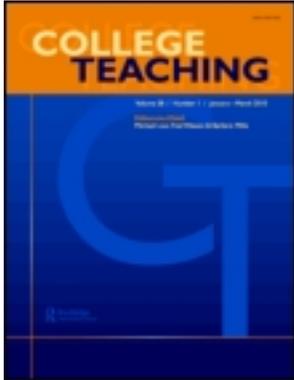


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The Tale of Two Degrees: The Need and Power of the Doctor of Arts

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Ph.D. programs train students to perform quality research but not necessarily to deliver quality undergraduate instruction. For students who want to develop such skills, and for universities interested in creating programs to combine broad disciplinary instruction with specialization in effective pedagogical practices, there is a Ph.D. alternative—the Doctor of Arts (D.A.). The D.A. is regarded as a Ph.D. equivalent and aims to better train students to be effective educators since the majority of academic positions are located at primarily undergraduate institutions, with substantially more faculty time consumed by teaching duties than research. A significant difference between traditional Ph.D. and D.A. students is the latter engage in scholarship of teaching and learning, through both topical seminars and participation in supervised teaching internships. Thirty years of job placement statistics gathered from Idaho State University D.A. programs indicate that graduates are well qualified to enter into faculty positions at a wide range of higher education institutions.

Keywords: Doctor of Arts, teaching doctorate, preparing faculty, scholarship of teaching and learning, pedagogy

You know the type of graduate student we are talking about: smart, motivated, passionate . . . about teaching. They *want* to teach and are good at it. They may even aspire to teach at primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs). Unfortunately, many of these students find that traditional doctoral programs do not support such goals; they train students to perform quality research but not necessarily to deliver quality undergraduate instruction. In fact, a majority of doctoral-candidates cannot even articulate a teaching philosophy (Golde and Dore 2001).

Some Ph.D. programs may offer students a seminar or two affording guidance and suggestions for preparing portfolios or lectures, but they do not typically offer training in structuring entire courses, learning theories, use of technology in classrooms, or effective assessment strategies. As more higher education institutions seek professors who can successfully integrate such pedagogical approaches into the classroom, recipients of the traditional Ph.D. may find themselves lacking the skills necessary to land a job with a primary teaching focus. A recent response to such changing profes-

sional responsibilities has been the induction of Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs. However, we would argue that, while PFF students often receive valuable insight into daily functioning and structure of higher education institutes, they do not typically receive rigorous training in effective pedagogical practice or learning theories (DeNeef 2002). Most unfortunately, typical Ph.D. students, including PFF students, will not be introduced to the rich literature concerning the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), literature that provides insights and evidence of best teaching practices and strategies for incorporating novel learning theories into the classroom. For students who want to develop such skills, and for universities interested in creating programs to combine broad disciplinary instruction with specialization in effective pedagogical practices, there is a Ph.D. alternative—the Doctor of Arts (D.A.) degree, sometimes referred to as the teaching doctorate.

The D.A., regarded as a Ph.D. equivalent by the U.S. Department of Education, was founded by the Carnegie Foundation in 1971 to better train students to be effective educators since the majority of academic positions are located at PUIs, with substantially more faculty time dedicated to teaching duties than research (Figure 1). While we realize that the D.A. degree is not suitable for all, those determined to work at a PUI and eager to combine discipline-specific training

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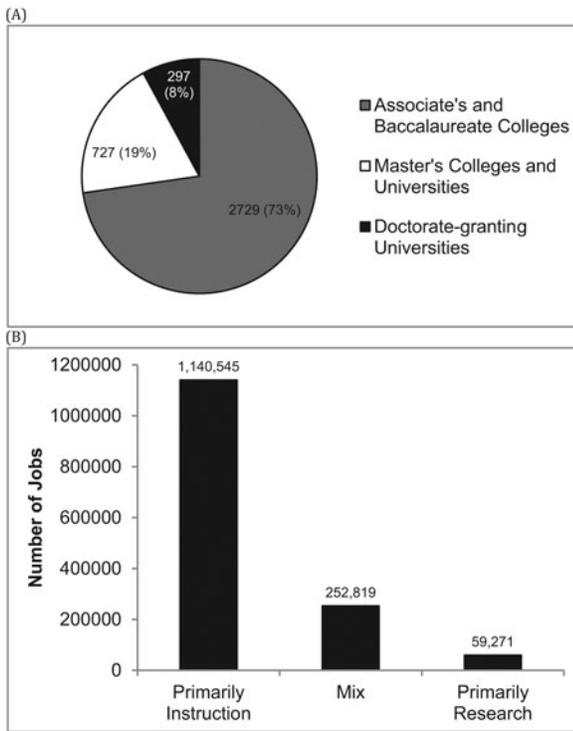


FIGURE 1 (A) Number and percent of institutions in the United States. Data from Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2010). (B) Number of staff positions at U.S. institutions whose responsibility is primarily instruction, equal instruction and research (mix), and primarily research. Data from U.S. Department of Education (2009).

with opportunities to develop skills in classroom instruction may find the D.A. program to be a perfect fit. We should note that another option now becoming available to like-minded students is education Ph.D. programs, like the Science Education or Biology Education Ph.D. (Rutledge 2013). Altogether these programs are still relatively rare (a handful of new Ph.D. programs and only 12 universities that still grant the D.A. [Shulman et al. 2006]), students of these programs are generally quite successful at finding university-level jobs and have a high level of satisfaction with their careers, often selecting positions that will allow them to find the right balance of teaching and scholarship. Here, we focus on our

experiences with the D.A. program at Idaho State University (ISU), which has a long history of producing D.A. graduates.

Like Ph.D. programs, rigorous coursework and independent research culminating in a dissertation are the cornerstones of the D.A. degree. While departmental requirements vary, many require completion of a Master's degree prior to entering the D.A. program and a combination of discipline-specific and pedagogical-centered coursework while in the program. Research projects also may vary, with some D.A. students focusing on disciplinary research much like Ph.D. students, while others opt for pedagogical-focused projects, and still others blend their interests to create a unique combination of disciplinary and pedagogical scholarship.

A significant difference between traditional Ph.D. and D.A. students is the latter engage in SoTL throughout their degree program. This engagement occurs through both topical seminars and from participation in supervised teaching internships. Faculty leaders of the D.A. program continuously update the graduate seminars to address recent issues in higher education- from assessment strategies to the ever-changing classroom technologies, and from neuroscience and teaching to how faculty in the sciences can engage in the SoTL. During the supervised teaching internships, students improve their competencies as future college-level educators and translate theories and strategies learned during the seminar series to classroom practice. One D.A. student compared his teaching internships with previous teaching assistant experiences, emphasizing that his previous experiences paled in comparison to the amount of responsibility and knowledge gained from the internships. Another D.A. student witnessed her teaching transform during these internships from an impromptu activity to a scholarly pursuit, approached methodically and informed by pedagogical research.

As with all graduate programs, individual experiences within the D.A. program vary by student and discipline. However, thirty years of job placement statistics gathered from ISU D.A. programs indicate that graduates of these programs are well qualified to enter into faculty positions at a wide range of higher education institutions (Table 1). These jobs include an equal mix of tenure- and non-tenure track (but usually permanent) positions, with several eventually moving into administrative positions. This variability

TABLE 1

Initial job placement by institution type of Idaho State University Doctor of Arts graduates in Biological Sciences (1979–2010), Mathematics (1973–2010), Political Science (1996–2008), and English (1997–2010). Last column gives the percentage of initial jobs that are tenure-track positions (does not include Community College faculty or permanent instructor positions)

	Associate's Colleges	Baccalaureate Colleges	Master's Colleges and Universities	Doctorate-granting Universities	Other	Faculty tenure-track positions
Biological Sciences <i>n</i> = 92	42 (46%)	27 (29%)	9 (10%)	3 (3%)	11 (12%)	56%
Mathematics <i>n</i> = 64	13 (20%)	18 (28%)	20 (31%)	11 (17%)	2 (3%)	41%
Political Science <i>n</i> = 23	4 (17%)	2 (9%)	7 (30%)	4 (17%)	6 (26%)	52%
English <i>n</i> = 19	4 (21%)	5 (26%)	9 (47%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	79%
Total <i>n</i> = 198	63 (32%)	52 (26%)	45 (23%)	18 (9%)	20 (10%)	51%

reflects the diversity of graduate preferences, with many selecting jobs that reflect their ideal balance of teaching and scholarship.

While the D.A. is not widely known, indeed a recent D.A. graduate found that among his coworkers, nobody had heard of the D.A. degree . . . and very few understand what the D.A. degree is meant for, we believe that it is a valuable and much needed alternative to a traditional Ph.D. By sharing our own experiences with the D.A. program, we hope to increase the understanding of this degree and to highlight the potential benefits for our future colleagues, students, and departments. Additionally, we think that some of the benefits of the D.A. program could be successfully incorporated into more traditional Ph.D. programs wishing to expand pedagogical training opportunities for their students. For example, the supervised teaching internships and the series of topical seminars, which we feel are the two most successful elements, have the potential to greatly improve the quality of college teachers among Ph.D. graduates.

Although the D.A. programs are rare, the hundreds of graduates of these programs have invaluable skills and knowledge of pedagogical practice and theory as well as in-depth knowledge of SoTL; therefore, D.A.-holders are valuable resources for others. Additionally, D.A.s are expected to take a critical and reflective approach to teaching, to not only implement but also evaluate novel pedagogical methods and provide evidence of effective instruction. This successfully

allows D.A. graduates to play an important role in developing and enhancing departmental programs that mentor faculty or graduate students in disciplinary teaching and learning. Overall, graduates of the D.A. program are uniquely prepared to assume faculty and leadership positions within higher education, thus filling a niche unfilled by graduates of most Ph.D. programs.

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