

The D.B.A. vs. Ph.D. in U.S. Business and Management Programs: Different by Degrees?

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Are the Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees offered by U.S. business and management programs separate and distinct from one another? We examine the history of the D.B.A. and how it is considered by regional and programmatic accrediting agencies and by the U.S. Department of Education. We then compare curriculum data for 107 doctoral business programs. Results indicate that D.B.A. and Ph.D. students receive very similar preparation and have similar program requirements. Accrediting agencies tend to treat both degrees identically; however, inconsistent doctoral degree classifications within the U.S. Department of Education send a mixed message.

INTRODUCTION

Students looking to further their education at the doctoral level in business and management may experience some confusion as they encounter two different degrees, the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and the Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.). Some higher education institutions offer only one of these degrees while others offer both. Still others may offer the Ph.D. in some disciplines and the D.B.A. in others. Trying to distinguish between the D.B.A. and Ph.D. is not a clear-cut task. One university may claim that the D.B.A. is an “applied” or “professional” degree, designed for business practitioners, while the Ph.D. is a “theoretical” or “research” degree, designed to prepare college and university faculty (e.g. Lewis, 2013). Another university, in contrast, will insist that its D.B.A. degree is just as rigorous a research degree as the Ph.D. and is also appropriate for those who are planning careers in academe (e.g. Harvard Business School, 2014a).

Prior Studies on Degree Differences

Throughout the past three decades, there have been numerous articles, dissertations and conference presentations discussing the similarities, differences and merits of differently-named doctoral degrees in education (Ph.D. and Ed.D.), public administration (Ph.D. and D.P.A.) and business (Ph.D. and D.B.A.) (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Brewer, Facer, O'Toole & Douglas, 1999; Deering, 1998; Author, 2012). By far, the largest amount of studies and most empirically-based studies have compared the Ed.D. and Ph.D. degrees in education (Nelson & Coorough, 1994; Osguthorpe & Wong, 1993; Ku, Plantz-Masters, Hosler, Diteyont, Akarasriworn & Lin, 2012). Overall, these studies have identified more similarities than differences between the “research” and “professional” doctoral degrees in education.

Articles comparing the D.B.A. to the Ph.D in business are far less frequent and tend to originate from the United Kingdom (e.g. Bareham, Bourner & Ruggeri-Stevens, 2000; Bourner, Ruggeri-Stevens & Bareham, 2000) or, even more frequently, from Australia (e.g. Erwee, 2004; Fink, 2006; Neumann; 2007; Sarros, Wills, & Palmer, 2005). Banerjee and Morley (2013) report that 37% of universities in the U.K. and Australia offer DBA programs, while less than 10% of U.S. universities do. The non-U.S. degrees tend to be differentiated by the method in which the learner completes the doctorate. These include: degrees by dissertation-only, with little or no course work; by collection of significant related publications; work, practice or clinical-based, or “taught” doctorate—the latter most resembling the U.S. model for doctoral study (Gill & Hoppe, 2009). While the U.K and Australia tend to use delivery mechanisms to create strong distinctions between the D.B.A. and Ph.D. degrees, Gill & Hoppe (2009) warn that this does not necessarily hold true in the U.S.

“The most widely offered business professional doctorate degree appears to be the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). It would be a mistake, however, to equate the DBA degree with professional doctorates. To begin with, many professional doctoral programs, particularly in the U.S., offer alternative degrees, such as the Executive Doctor of Management offered by Case Western University. In addition, there are some DBA programs—such as that offered by Harvard Business School—where the purpose and organization of the degree is more closely aligned with that of a traditional academic Ph.D” (Gill & Hoppe, 2009, p. 32).

Lockhart & Stablein (2002) were even more emphatic, stating that, “The terms PhD and DBA are used synonymously in the United States (p. 193). Banerjee and Morley (2013), acknowledging the differences between U.S., Australian and U.K. doctoral education, speculated that D.B.A. and Ph.D. programs in the U.S. could possibly be differentiated by curriculum and structure:

The DBA is more prevalent in Australia and the United Kingdom than in the United States. North American doctoral programs like the PhD already contain a substantial coursework component, unlike their UK and Australian counterparts. Thus, while the presence of coursework is an important factor that distinguishes the DBA from the PhD in Australia and the United Kingdom, it is the content and structure that could

differentiate the DBA from the PhD in North American markets (Banerjee and Morley (2013, p. 187).

In this study, we look at the history of the D.B.A., the often confusing and contradictory state of “professional doctoral degrees” in the United States and how the D.B.A. is considered by regional accrediting agencies, by the three national agencies that accredit business programs, and by the U.S. Department of Education. We then look at what business and management programs themselves have to say, by comparing D.B.A. and Ph.D. curriculum data for over 100 U.S. doctoral business programs.

Origin of the DBA

Like the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and Doctor of Public Administration (D.P.A.), the Doctor of Business Administration degree traces its origins to Harvard University and the desire of Harvard’s professional schools to offer their own terminal degrees. Harvard Corporation, the University’s governing body, permits the Ph.D. to be offered only by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (Harvard Business School, 2014a; Harvard Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, 2014). Professional schools at Harvard (Business, Education, Medical, Divinity, Government, etc.) may offer their own doctoral degrees, but may not offer the Ph.D. unless it is administered jointly with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

In 1922, Harvard began offering doctoral education in business (Lockhart & Stablein, 2002). Harvard Corporation authorized the Harvard Business School (H.B.S.) to offer its own doctoral degree, the Doctor of Commercial Science (D.C.S.). The first D.C.S. degree was awarded in 1928 and the second in 1932 (Harvard Business School, 2014; Harvard Crimson Staff, 1932). The degree was never very popular, so, in 1953, with funding from the Ford Foundation, the faculty of Harvard Business School successfully petitioned the University to allow for the enlargement of its doctoral program and, ultimately, to replace its D.C.S. degree with a new degree: the Doctor of Business Administration. The first D.B.A. degree was awarded in 1955. Within five years, nearly four times as many students were graduating with the D.B.A., rather than the D.C.S. (Harvard Business School, 2014). For the next three decades, the D.B.A. was the dominant business doctorate at Harvard, until joint Ph.D. programs with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences began to be established in selected disciplines. The DBA degree began to be adopted internationally in the early 1990s (Banerjee & Morley, 2013).

First Professional Degrees

The D.C.S. was a practice-oriented degree that would have been similar in scope and emphasis to degrees from Harvard’s other professional schools, such as the school of medicine and the school of law. The degrees from these and other professional schools have been known commonly as “first professional” degrees, as they tend to provide entry-level qualifications to enter into a particular profession and to “undertake graduate study in these professional fields following the award of the first-professional degree” (USNEI, 2008b, p. 1). Master’s or research doctorate degrees, if sought, tend to be completed after the first professional degrees.

For several years, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) has published a taxonomy of degrees on its ED.gov website called the *Structure of U.S. Education*. Included are documents that include definitions for associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees, first professional degrees, master’s degrees, intermediate graduate qualifications and research doctorate degrees and

examples of degrees in each category (USNEI, 2008a). The document for first professional degrees includes the following: M.D., J.D., D.M.D., D.D.S. Pharm.D., D.O., D.C., D.V.M., O.D., D.P.M. and M.Div. The document states, “Several of these degrees use the term “doctor” in the title, but these degrees do not contain an independent research component or require a dissertation (thesis) and should not be confused with PhD degrees or other research doctorates” (USNEI, 2008b, p. 1).

Research Doctorates

The change from D.C.S. to D.B.A. at Harvard involved strengthening the degree’s research dissertation component, making the D.B.A. more closely resemble the University’s Ph.D. than its other first professional degrees. The *Structure of U.S. Education* defines research doctoral degrees as “structured programs of advanced study and supervised research,” where the doctoral candidate selects a research committee that approves and advises the candidate until the dissertation is completed and the candidate is scheduled for a public oral examination to defend the dissertation (USNEI, 2008c, p.1). The document also includes a list of degrees, including the Ph.D., D.B.A., Ed.D. and 21 other “frequently awarded research doctorate degrees...representing degrees equivalent in content and level to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree” (USNEI, 2008c, p. 2).

U.S. Department of Education Changes Classifications

The *Structure of U.S. Education* appears to make a clear statement from the USDOE regarding the D.B.A., namely that it is a research doctorate equivalent to and at the same level as the Ph.D. and is not to be regarded as a first professional degree. Given that the D.B.A. is awarded in the same business disciplines as the Ph.D., it might not be unreasonable to suggest that if Harvard had allowed its School of Business to offer Ph.D. degrees, the D.B.A. degree might not even exist.

However, two recent actions from within the USDOE have sent mixed messages regarding the D.B.A. The first occurred in 2007, when the U.S. Secretary of Education approved the petition of the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), an accrediting agency for distance and correspondence education institutions, petitioned to have its scope of accreditation expanded from “the first professional doctorate” to “professional doctoral degree programs” (DECT, 2007; Federal Register, 2006). In 2015, the DETC changed its name to the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC, 2015a)

A definition of what constitutes “professional doctoral degree programs” is not found on the ED.gov website. However, the DEAC includes the following statement in its accreditation manual: “DETC defines ‘professional doctoral degree’ to mean a post-master’s graduate level degree that prepares individuals through internships, practical application of training, and/or specialized certifications, for professional practice (such as the Doctor of Business Administration), as opposed to research methodologies that are associated with academic doctorate degrees (such as the Doctor of Philosophy)” (DEAC, 2015b, Sec. C9, p.1). The second action occurred in 2010, when the USDOE’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) changed its Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) classification of instructional programs, resulting in three new classifications for doctoral degrees (NCES, 2014a).

- *Doctor's Degree-Professional Practice*: A doctor's degree that is conferred upon completion of a program providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice...Some of these degrees were formerly classified as first-professional and may include: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Law (J.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Optometry (O.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., Pod.D., D.P.); or, Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), and others, as designated by the awarding institution.
- *Doctor's Degree-Research/Scholarship*: A Ph.D. or other doctor's degree that requires advanced work beyond the master's level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement. Some examples of this type of degree may include Ed.D., D.M.A., D.B.A., D.Sc., D.A., or D.M, and others, as designated by the awarding institution.
- *Doctor's Degree-Other*: A doctor's degree that does not meet the definition of a Doctor's degree-research/scholarship or a Doctor's degree-professional practice (NCES, 2014a, p.1)

At first glance, it might seem that Doctor's Degree-Professional Practice and Doctor's Degree-Research/Scholarship are merely renamed versions of the First Professional and Research Doctorate classifications from the Structure of U.S. Education. However, these new doctoral classifications introduced language that changed the nature of degree classifications. The Structure provides a list of first professional degrees and a list of research doctorate degrees, while new classifications list degrees that MAY be considered professional practice or research/scholarship doctoral degrees. The NCES Q&A page for the new classification makes it clear that the change was intentional:

“It is at the discretion of the individual postsecondary institution, whether an Ed.D should be classified in one the following three categories: Doctor's Degree-Research and Scholarship (Award Level=17); Doctor's Degree-Professional Practice (Award Level=18); and Doctor's Degree-Other (Award Level=19). IPEDS users are encouraged to consult the IPEDS Glossary (<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/>), which provides detailed definitions of each of the award levels. Please note that in each of these definitions, examples of degrees are provided. These examples are intended to be illustrative and are not prescriptive” (NCES, 2014b, p.1).

While this answer was in response to a question about the classification of the Ed.D. degree, it is clearly applicable to the D.B.A., as the DEAC's above definition of “professional doctoral degree” explicitly uses the term “professional practice” (i.e. Doctoral Degree-Professional practice) to justify the inclusion of D.B.A. (and the Ed.D.) within the scope of its accreditation (DEAC, 2015, Sec. C9, p.1).

Since the *Structure of U.S. Education* remains on the ED.gov website, it is unclear whether the agencies within USDOE are promoting their own unique degree classifications or whether this is a case of the “left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.” As a result, the USDOE currently provides conflicting views regarding the D.B.A. versus the Ph.D.

Regional Accrediting Agencies

Do the agencies that accredit U.S. colleges and universities distinguish between the D.B.A. and the Ph.D. degrees? Unlike most of the world's countries, the authorization and quality assurance of U.S. higher education institutions is not a function of the federal government. The individual states authorize colleges and universities to operate within their borders and quality assurance is undertaken by the six regional accrediting agencies that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to have authority to evaluate and accredit colleges and universities within their assigned geographic region.

An analysis was undertaken of the accreditation resource manuals, faculty credentials guidelines and websites of the six regional agencies that accredit colleges and universities in the US:

- Middle States Commission on Higher Education - Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (MSCHE, 2009; 2011)
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges - Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont (CIHE, 2011)
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming (Higher Learning Commission, 2013; 2014)
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities - Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington. (NWCCU, 2013)
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Latin America (SACS-COC, 2006; 2012)
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges - California, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Northern Mariana Islands and Palau (WASC, 2013).

Since the scope of regional accrediting agencies is the entire institution, including its governance, operations, business, finances, resources, services and curriculum/instruction, the accreditation documents and processes focused primarily on whether faculty were terminally degreed or whether they possessed the terminal degree in the discipline. When discussing credentials of teaching faculty, guidelines from SACS are typical: "Faculty teaching graduate and post-baccalaureate course work: earned doctorate/terminal degree in the teaching discipline or a related discipline" (SACS-COC, 2006, p.1).

None of the accreditation documents, faculty credential documents or websites from the six regional accrediting agencies indicated any difference in the accreditation requirements standards for programs that offered the D.B.A. versus those that offered the Ph.D. In fact, requirements for programs that award doctoral degrees tended not to mention the names of the degrees at all.

National Business Accrediting Agencies

Given the institutional focus of regional accreditation, we then turned to three national agencies authorized by CHEA to provide “programmatically” or “specialized” accreditation for business and management programs: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) and the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). The AACSB, founded nearly a century ago, is the oldest and largest of the three business accrediting bodies and accredits programs at the baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels (Brink & Smith, 2012). The ACBSP was founded in 1988 with a focus on mission-driven assessment, rather than inputs such as quantity of faculty research, and accredits associate degrees, along with bachelor’s master’s and doctoral degrees (Brink & Smith, 2012, Green & Gash, 2010). The IACBE was established in 1997 to focus more heavily upon student learning outcomes and to evaluate programs based on “principles,” rather than rigid and prescriptive “standards” (Green & Gash, 2010).

An analysis was undertaken of the accreditation resource manuals, faculty credentials guidelines and websites of the three national business accreditation agencies to determine if they distinguished between the D.B.A. and Ph.D. in terms of program accreditation requirements (AACSB, 2009, 2013; ACBSP, 2013, 2014; IACBE, 2011, 2012). Each of the three agencies publishes requirements, standards and/or principles for business programs seeking initial or renewed accreditation at the doctoral level.

In its document, *Becoming a Business Professor* (AACSB, 2007), AACSB states that, “In an earlier era of business education, the DBA was popularly regarded as providing a more general exposure to business topics geared towards practice, while the PhD was viewed as focusing more on research in a given business specialty. Over time, the distinction between these degrees has become blurred at many institutions” (p. 1-2). The accreditation documents from AACSB, IACBE and ACBSP indicate that this is indeed the case, as the Ph.D. in business and the D.B.A. are considered by all three agencies to be “in-discipline” degrees, while other doctorates, including the Ed.D., J.D. and D.P.A. are considered “out of discipline” degrees. Neither the AACSB, IACBE nor ACBSP have differing accreditation requirements for institutions that offer the D.B.A. versus those that offer the Ph.D.

Summary

The existent research, the regional accrediting agencies, and the national business accreditation agencies do not distinguish between the D.B.A. and the Ph.D. in business and management. The U.S. Department of Education, however, sends a mixed message, with one USDOE agency equating the D.B.A. and Ph.D. as equivalent research doctorates and another allowing institutions and other organizations to create definitions that allow the two degrees to be classified as fundamentally different.

METHOD

Since differences between the D.B.A. and Ph.D. degrees could not be identified according to accreditation requirements, the empirical portion of the study focused on curriculum and research requirements of U.S. D.B.A. and Ph.D. programs in business and management. The following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: D.B.A. and Ph.D. degree programs differ by number of required credit hours.

- H2: D.B.A. and Ph.D. degree programs differ by number of required research courses.
- H3: D.B.A. and Ph.D. degree programs differ by type of required research courses.
- H4: D.B.A. and Ph.D. degree programs differ by comprehensive exam requirement.
- H5: D.B.A. and Ph.D. degree programs differ by dissertation requirement.

Participants

Participants in this study included 107 doctoral programs in management and general business from 104 regionally accredited institutions. The Ph.D. was awarded by 92 of the programs and D.B.A. from 15. To be included in this study, institutions had to be regionally accredited and the management programs had to be programmatically accredited by either AACSB, IACBE or ACBSP. Institutions whose schools of business were programmatically accredited, but whose doctoral programs were relatively new and did not have the longevity to be included in the programmatic accreditation were excluded from this study--for example, IACBE requires doctoral programs to have two years' worth of graduates before the doctorate can be IACBE accredited (IACBE, 2011). Fourteen institutions did not include sufficient information about their Ph.D. or D.B.A. curriculum and were not included in the list programs. In addition, programs in related disciplines, including accounting, finance, operations/supply chain, marketing and information technology management, were also excluded from this study.

Procedure

Eligible institutions were identified by performing searches of member institutions lists on the AACSB, IACBE and ACBSP websites. Websites and catalogs from each eligible institution were examined by degree title, total semester units/credit hours required, number of required quantitative courses, number of required qualitative courses, number of other research courses, total number of research courses, whether a comprehensive examination was required, whether a research dissertation was required, whether an applied research project or series of publications could be substituted for a dissertation. In cases where an institution operated on the quarter system, the courses were converted to semester hour using a formula of 1.5 quarter hours=1 semester hour.

Data Analysis

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for group mean differences across the dependent variables. Specifically, Ph.D. degree programs were contrasted with D.B.A. degree programs to test for differences in the total number of semester credit hours required, the amount and type of required research courses, and whether there was a required comprehensive examination and a research dissertation. The research course requirement was sub-categorized to include quantitative research, qualitative research, mixed-methods, applied research, and other research. A comparison of these categories was used to identify possible differences in the Ph.D. and D.B.A. degrees.

RESULTS

The number of required credit hours ranged from 37-90 for the Ph.D. and 48-68 for the D.B.A. Sixty credit hours was the most common program length for both Ph.D. (29% of programs) and D.B.A. (53% of programs). On average, the number of quantitative research courses was slightly higher ($M = 2.68$, $SE = .137$) for the Ph.D. programs ($n = 79$) than the

requirement ($M = 2.07$, $SE = .267$) for the D.B.A. programs ($n = 14$). However, qualitative research course requirements were slightly higher ($M = .33$, $SE = .126$) for the D.B.A. programs ($n = 15$) than they were ($M = .27$, $SE = .071$) for the Ph.D. programs ($n = 48$). The total number of research courses required was only slightly higher ($M = 4.65$, $SE = .150$) for the Ph.D. programs ($n = 92$) at those required ($M = 3.93$, $SE = .228$) for D.B.A. programs ($n = 15$).

Table 1: Analysis of Variance.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total Units Required	Between Groups	352.346	1	352.346	2.825	.096
	Within Groups	13096.009	105	124.724		
	Total	13448.355	106			
# Quantitative Courses	Between Groups	4.456	1	4.456	3.167	.078
	Within Groups	128.017	91	1.407		
	Total	132.473	92			
# Qualitative Courses	Between Groups	.045	1	.045	.184	.670
	Within Groups	14.813	61	.243		
	Total	14.857	62			
# Mixed Methods	Between Groups	1.334	1	1.334	1.795	.185
	Within Groups	46.820	63	.743		
	Total	48.154	64			
Total Research	Between Groups	6.664	1	6.664	3.502	.064
	Within Groups	199.803	105	1.903		
	Total	206.467	106			
Research Dissertation	Between Groups	.057	1	.057	6.449	.013
	Within Groups	.933	105	.009		
	Total	.991	106			
Other Research	Between Groups	3.003	1	3.003	1.553	.216
	Within Groups	187.543	97	1.933		
	Total	190.545	98			
Applied Research	Between Groups	.000	1	.000	.	.
	Within Groups	.000	0	.		
	Total	.000	1			
Comp Exam	Between Groups	.000	1	.000	.	.
	Within Groups	.000	104	.000		
	Total	.000	105			

Results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 1 above. The comparison indicated no statistically significant Ph.D. & D.B.A. group mean differences in the number of semester credit

hours required $F(1,106) = 2.825$, $p = .096$, number of quantitative courses required $F(1,92) = 3.167$, $p = .078$, number of qualitative courses required $F(1,62) = .184$, $p = .067$, number of mixed methods courses required $F(1,64) = 1.795$, $p = .185$, and total number of research courses required $F(1,106) = 3.502$, $p = .064$. The analysis indicated no group differences in the applied research and comprehensive exam requirements. Although the ANOVA indicated a statistically significant group mean difference in the dissertation research requirement $F(1,106) = 6.449$, $p = .013$, a total of 14 of the 15 reviewed D.B.A. programs indicated dissertation research as a requirement.

No support for significant differences between the Ph.D. and D.B.A. was found for hypotheses H1 (credit hour differences), H2 (number of required research courses), H3 (type of research required), and H4 (comprehensive exam requirement). Hypothesis H5 (dissertation requirement) was supported using the complete data set. However, with the elimination of one program from the sample, the results indicate no significant difference.

DISCUSSION

In 2004 the Peabody School of Education at Vanderbilt University sought to redefine the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree in a way to make it distinct from the Ph.D. in education. As a result, the curriculum of the Vanderbilt Ed.D. was radically redesigned, including a unique series of research courses with a different focus than the courses required for the Ph.D. (Caboni & Proper, 2009). Other institutions have followed suit to try to make the Ed.D. distinguishable from the Ph.D. in education. As this study indicates, this same level of reform and change has not occurred relative to the D.B.A. versus the Ph.D. in business and management.

Those who promote the idea of differences between the D.B.A. and Ph.D. based on the idea that the former prepares practitioner-scholars, while the latter prepares academic researchers, will not find much support in the results of this study. Overall, it appears that D.B.A. and Ph.D. students receive very similar preparation during their academic coursework, are required to take comprehensive examinations, and are almost always expected to culminate their studies with a research dissertation.

Regional and national accrediting agencies were found to treat the D.B.A. and Ph.D. as comparable—if not identical—degrees. However, the U.S. Department of Education's inconsistent actions towards these degrees muddies the water considerably. With one USDOE agency declaring the D.B.A. to be equal to the research Ph.D., while another authorizing non-regionally accredited schools to award the D.B.A. (but not the Ph.D.) and a third allowing doctoral degrees to be classified any way that an institution wishes, little comfort is provided by the USDOE for those who wish to avoid the D.B.A. from being classified as a “Ph.D.-lite.”

Future Research

The Ph.D. is a more popular doctoral degree than the D.B.A. in business and management and is less likely to elicit confusion (since DBA also means “database administrator” or “doing business as”). Nevertheless, there are several reasons why an institution may wish to consider offering a D.B.A., rather than a Ph.D. The success of the California State University (CSU) System in convincing the state's legislature to allow its campuses to award “professional doctorates” over years of opposition by the University of California (UC) system, coupled with the fact that the U.S. Department of Education allows non-regionally accredited schools to award the D.B.A., could embolden institutions who wish to offer

their first doctoral program. It would appear to be easier to get a D.B.A. approved by licensing bodies than it would be to get a Ph.D. approved: however, this has not been tested empirically and could be a fruitful area for further study. In addition, the idea that the primary difference between the Ph.D. and D.B.A. dissertations is that the former tend to be theory-based, while the latter is practice-based also has no research support. An analysis of Ph.D. and D.B.A. dissertations would add to the knowledge base on this subject.

The relatively small number of IACBE (3) and ACBSP (8) doctoral programs precluded an analysis of the differences by specialized accrediting agency; however this study could be replicated with regionally and/or nationally accredited institutions whose doctoral degrees are not secondarily accredited by either AACSB, IACBE or ACBSP, to see whether specialized accreditation or national versus regional accreditation makes a difference. Other possible areas of research that could be fruitful are to study whether D.B.A. programs are more likely to have part-time residencies or to be offered online and whether there are sufficient numbers of business faculty with D.B.A. degrees to consider it as a viable degree for those wishing to work in academe.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Sullivan University Office of Institutional Research for providing a research grant to support this project and Tammy Kaelin, who collected data for this study and reviewed an earlier version of this article.

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