

University History of the Fielding Graduate Institute

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Fielding Graduate Institute, USA

Fielding Graduate Institute was founded in 1974 in Santa Barbara, California by educators who envisioned a graduate school serving mid-career professionals wanting to pursue an advanced degree. The educator's learning needs were not being met by traditional institutions of higher education because of style, location or lifestyle fit. Several founders were psychologists and one was deputy director of the Peace Corps, with an understanding of distributed learning. According to university history, the founders recognized that students seeking advanced degrees would generally be mid-career adults wishing to enhance their professional skills. These students would also be interested in being scholar-practitioners participating in a collaborative lifetime-learning community. At first glance, Fielding appears to be a small university having only 1,500 students, with more than 100 members of staff and 150 faculty members. Fielding is actually quite a large graduate university. However, since Fielding does not have an undergraduate program on which to perch, it may appear to some to be small.

The median student is 48-years-old, approximately 40% of students are minorities, and 52 % are women. Fielding also produces more Native American doctorates than any other university in America. Fielding Graduate Institute offers masters and doctoral degrees within three schools: Psychology, Human and Organization Development and Educational Leadership and Change.

The university philosophy is based on the notion that adults learn in ways that can differ significantly from those of adolescents. The theme of Fielding is based on "learning how to learn". The programs are distributed so that working adults all over the world may participate, blending their programs with their work. To accommodate the learning styles of its adult learners, Fielding developed a learning model

that is characterized as "flexible, adult-centered, self-directed, task-oriented, competence-based, collaborative and Socratic." Students may work in virtual technology centric clusters or regional physical clusters if they wish. Semi-annual in-person seminars are offered, with activities scheduled on alternate coasts during summer and winter. These seminars are offered so that the proximity is not an issue for students. Since the international dimension of Fielding is growing, it is anticipated that there will be international clusters in the future.

The permanent administrative headquarters of Fielding is in Santa Barbara, California, where approximately 150 staff members work in the several administrative and student service buildings. While the Fielding program is Socratic, it is also computer and technology centric. The Internet is used extensively to facilitate communication at a distance through an evolving learning-management system called Felix. This system is the center of the Fielding global communication network. The elements of Fielding's learning model include a living student learning plan, contract-based learning, competency-based assessment, student-to-student peer feedback, project and portfolio reviews, and a traditional dissertation in the Fielding doctoral programs.

Fielding's distributed model has been evolving and being perfected for thirty years. It is one of the most highly developed distributed graduate degree models in the world. Fielding has about 4,000 doctoral graduates and is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The program in Clinical Psychology is accredited by the American Psychological Association.

Fielding has been pioneering education with respect to place and time, blending with professional growth and development, striving for diversity, and successfully perfecting means of working at a dis-

tance for almost thirty years. Fielding Graduate Institute is one of the emerging leaders in distributed graduate education, as well as one an emerging model of 21st century graduate education.

REFERENCES

Fielding Graduate Institute Web site:
www.fielding.edu

Interview, Dr. Bernard J. Luskin, Executive Vice President

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