Chapter 68
Adapting and Advocating for an Online EdD Program in Changing Times and "Sacred" Cultures

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to underscore the importance of recognizing how complex cultural and structural forces shape the design and delivery of a fully online professional doctorate (EdD) program. This chapter considers various challenges and opportunities of a new distance-delivery EdD program in Educational Leadership offered by a leading Canadian university in order to examine how the pressures of educational reform and academic cultural norms shape professional doctorate programs and their components. Ultimately, this chapter calls for promoting greater adaptability within EdD program designs and stronger championing of the program's value and distinctiveness, especially its capacity to be adaptable to the expectations of student stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

University programs come to life in the implementation of their designs. Across North America, professional doctorates in educational leadership are designed to prepare versatile and adaptable educational leaders who perform at their optimum capacity to enable their organization's success. Such professionally-oriented doctoral programs may require substantive shifts in thinking at their institutions, particularly when long-standing and closely-held traditions are challenged by new doctoral program innovations. Online program delivery, in particular, requires new ways of planning as well as solid cultural and structural supports to ensure program success. Amidst calls for post-secondary education reform (New Media Consortium, 2014), professional doctorate programs are tasked with modeling the very adaptability that they develop in their graduates.

To adequately support professional doctorate students, change-driving programs must be agile and prepared to respond to anticipated and unforeseen program challenges as they arise. The culture in which a program is developed and delivered, in particular, will deeply influence that program's shared vision, support resources, and staff commitment to the program. The success of professional programs often relies, at least in some part, upon the very academic and governmental units that are also responsible for creating the conditions for the programs' success. However, past traditions and expectations, which fuel ideological and practical concerns about professional and online programs, may result in slowing the change and agility that would make these programs more successful. A central question emerges: how can professional doctorate programs develop strong roots (as well as bending branches) in existing systems and contexts that have not been built to grow them?

Western University's professional doctorate (EdD) in Educational Leadership, the flagship of the Faculty of Education's professional programs, is driving notable institutional and educational change within Ontario, Canada. Using a dissertation model that combines the scholarly focus of a PhD with the practitioner focus of an EdD, the Faculty is striving to cultivate scholar practitioners whose doctoral dissertations, developed throughout the program's three-year delivery model, are to be both sound in design and relevant to professional practice (Perry, 2015; Shulman et al., 2006). A core goal of the program is to elevate practitioners' knowledge of education research while ensuring the meaningful application of that knowledge beyond the academy. Although this new practice-focused degree program provides flexible delivery and practice-relevant doctoral-level scholarship, the "lumps and bumps" of early program implementation have already yielded the value of a program that can be further adapted to suit stakeholder needs.

Western's fully online EdD is an example of a professional doctorate whose delivery and deliverables must meet the expectations of both those who demand educational reform and those who caution against it. Deeply entrenched epistemic and cultural norms within the program's research-intensive institution maintain a climate of caution in response to its elements that diverge from tradition. Western's fully online professional doctorate program must thus embed strategies for careful adaptability and advocacy into the very fabric of its design and implementation so that it may deliver on its promise to provide accessible delivery, mastery of appropriate knowledge and skills, and academically rigorous yet professionally relevant capstone research projects.

Part I of this chapter introduces the professional doctorate at Western's delivery model and design components, along with a brief thematic glimpse into a selection of early program feedback. Part II considers how Western's EdD typifies the ways that professional doctorate programs both shape and are shaped by calls for educational reform, cost-savings, twenty-first century skills, and responsiveness to the needs of "re-entry" adult learners. Part III explores some of the norms and expectations held by those who, at arm's length, are responsible for approving, reviewing, and supporting program modifications. Finally, Part IV proposes some general ideas for beginning to think about ways to continue developing program adaptability and advocacy in one's own institution.

In the limited space of this chapter, full consideration cannot be given to philosophical discussions related to the history and relative value of the PhD and the EdD (Green, Maxwell, & Shanahan, 2001; Andersen, 1983; Osguthorpe & Wong, 1993; Deering, 1998). Substantial research already exists on general approaches to eLearning strategy and technology management in higher education, and so will also not be considered at length (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2009; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2009; Bates & Sangrà, 2011). More investigation of the historical development of professional doctorates in

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