

5 QUESTIONS

PA EDUCATORS SHOULD ASK BEFORE CHOOSING A DOCTORAL PROGRAM

A doctorate is more than another credential. The right program should fit the work you are already doing, strengthen the educator and scholar you want to become, and move you toward the opportunities you want next.

Before comparing program names, compare what the degree will actually help you do.

1 Will this program make me a better educator - not just give me another credential?

Look beyond the letters after your name. A strong program should deepen your understanding of learning, assessment, curriculum design, educational technology, and evidence-based teaching. For PA faculty, the most useful learning should transfer directly into the classroom, lab, simulation, clinical education, or program leadership.

Ask yourself: *What will I be able to teach, design, lead, or evaluate more effectively because of this degree?*

2 Can I realistically complete it while continuing to work?

The best program on paper is not the best program if its structure does not fit your life. Pay attention to delivery format, synchronous expectations, course sequencing, workload, and how much flexibility exists when professional or personal demands change.

Ask yourself: *Can I see myself sustaining this pace during a busy semester, accreditation cycle, clinical workload, or major life event?*

3 Will I develop as both an educator and a scholar?

Doctoral study should help you move from consuming evidence to producing and applying it. Look for deliberate preparation in research design, statistics or qualitative methods, scholarly writing, dissemination, and mentorship - alongside meaningful development as an educator.

Ask yourself: *Will this program help me answer the questions I am already asking about teaching, learners, outcomes, and health professions education?*

KEEP ASKING THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

A doctoral program should fit where you are now - and prepare you for where you want to go next.

4

Does the program include meaningful opportunities to practice what I am learning?

Coursework matters, but applied experience is where professional growth becomes visible. Look for opportunities to teach, mentor, design curriculum, lead educational initiatives, or complete a practicum with an experienced educator. Application is especially valuable if your long-term goals include promotion, program leadership, or a transition into academia.

Ask yourself: *Will I graduate with experiences and examples that demonstrate what I can do - not just courses I completed?*

5

Does the program align with the next version of my career?

Start with the future you are considering. That may be stronger teaching, promotion, program leadership, research, faculty development, administration, or a transition from clinical practice into higher education. Different doctorates are built for different outcomes, so the degree title alone should not drive the decision.

Ask yourself: *What do I want to be doing three to five years from now, and does this program intentionally prepare me for it?*

ONE FINAL QUESTION

Can I picture myself becoming the educator, scholar, and leader I want to be in this program?

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Choose the degree that helps you become more intentional about the impact you want to have - on learners, programs, and the future of healthcare education.