

Stigmas and limited opportunities of on-line and for-profit university doctorate graduates in Technology, Healthcare, and Business

Estigmas y oportunidades limitadas de los doctorados universitarios en línea y con fines de lucro en Tecnología, Salud y Negocios

Estigmas e oportunidades limitadas para doutorados universitários online e com fins lucrativos em Tecnologia, Saúde e Negócios

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Abstract

Introduction: Walden, Capella, and the University of Phoenix universities generate many African-American doctoral graduates, according to *Diverse Problems in Higher Education*.

Problem: While these universities graduate many minority students with doctoral degrees, they contribute significantly to student loan debt. These universities are for-profit, on-line, or owned by for-profits. Because of that classification, these universities and their doctoral degrees have stigmas in higher education that may hinder African-American and other minority faculty chances at elite, state flagship, and prestigious research universities.

Objective: The research aims to formulate strategies to help African-Americans be more knowledgeable about non-traditional doctoral program selection and the current stigmas of graduating with a doctorate from a totally on-line or for-profit university. The purpose is not to diminish the accomplishment of anyone with the intellect, courage, and talent to get a regionally accredited doctoral degree. This research intends to educate and empower African-American and other students of color in their doctoral decision-making and discuss the stigmas against doctorates from for-profit universities and totally on-line universities in the U.S.

Methodology: The approach used was a content analysis of the literature and qualitative interviews using a phenomenological research approach. The purpose is not to diminish or demonize graduates and degrees from regionally accredited on-line doctorate programs offered by for-profit universities, because they have provided opportunities and access to doctoral education. The goal is to share the realities of the current stigmas of those degrees from those universities in academic communities at the most highly ranked universities. The ultimate aim would be to educate them on the importance of school choice, even if the only viable option for doctoral completion is an on-line or hybrid doctoral program.

Results: Academic careers often depend on having a doctorate and the university that awards that doctorate. So, African-Americans and other students of color should investigate and choose brick-and-mortar universities with on-line and hybrid doctoral programs, which are often viewed more favorably. This study offers an accurate world understanding of the challenges and stigmas of African-American doctoral graduates driven by where they pursue their doctorate degrees.

Conclusion: This project seeks to change the behavior of doctoral program selection and modification practices that would make graduates more successful and favorable for full-time faculty jobs after graduation.

Originality: The gap in the literature explored is the limited academic discussion about how attending and completing a doctorate from one of these universities can be detrimental to African-Americans, especially if they are interested in full-time tenure-track faculty careers at non-profit research universities.

Limitations: More current research is needed on the stigmas and challenges of getting a doctorate from a for-profit or totally online university. More scholarly dialogues from the literature could have enriched the study.

Keywords: On-line education, on-line doctorates, for-profit universities, African-American doctoral students, on-line universities, Walden University, University of Phoenix, Capella University.

Resumen

Introducción: las universidades Walden, Capella y la Universidad de Phoenix generan muchos graduados de doctorado afroamericanos, según *Problemas diversos en educación superior*.

Problema: si bien estas universidades gradúan a muchos estudiantes minoritarios con títulos de doctorado, contribuyen significativamente a la deuda por préstamos estudiantiles. Estas universidades con grados en línea son propiedad de organizaciones con fines de lucro. Debido a esa clasificación, estas universidades y sus títulos de doctorado tienen estigmas en la educación superior que pueden obstaculizar las oportunidades

de los profesores afroamericanos y otras minorías en universidades de investigación de élite, emblemáticas estatales y prestigiosas.

Objetivo: la investigación tiene como objetivo formular estrategias para ayudar a los afroamericanos a tener más conocimientos sobre la selección de programas de doctorado no tradicionales y los estigmas actuales de graduarse con un doctorado de una universidad totalmente en línea o con fines de lucro. El propósito no es disminuir los logros de cualquier persona con el intelecto, el coraje y el talento para obtener un título de doctorado acreditado regionalmente. Esta investigación pretende educar y empoderar a los estudiantes afroamericanos y otros estudiantes de color en su toma de decisiones doctorales y discutir los estigmas contra los doctorados de universidades con fines de lucro y universidades totalmente en línea en los EE. UU.

Método: el enfoque utilizado fue un análisis de contenido de la literatura y entrevistas cualitativas utilizando un enfoque de investigación fenomenológico. El propósito no es menospreciar ni demonizar a los graduados y títulos de programas de doctorado en línea acreditados regionalmente y ofrecidos por universidades con fines de lucro, porque han brindado oportunidades y acceso a la educación doctoral. El objetivo es compartir las realidades de los estigmas actuales de esos títulos de esas universidades en las comunidades académicas de las universidades mejor clasificadas. El objetivo final sería educarlos sobre la importancia de la elección de escuela, incluso si la única opción viable para completar el doctorado es un programa de doctorado en línea o híbrido.

Resultados: las carreras académicas a menudo dependen de tener un doctorado y de la universidad que otorga ese doctorado. Por lo tanto, los afroamericanos y otros estudiantes de color deberían investigar y elegir universidades físicas con programas de doctorado híbridos y en línea, que a menudo se ven más favorablemente. Este estudio ofrece una comprensión mundial precisa de los desafíos y estigmas de los graduados de doctorado afroamericanos impulsados por el lugar donde obtienen sus títulos de doctorado.

Conclusión: este proyecto busca cambiar el comportamiento de las prácticas de selección y modificación de programas de doctorado que harían que los graduados fueran más exitosos y favorables para puestos docentes de tiempo completo después de graduarse.

Originalidad: la brecha en la literatura explorada es la discusión académica limitada sobre cómo asistir y completar un doctorado en una de estas universidades puede ser perjudicial para los afroamericanos, especialmente si están interesados en carreras docentes permanentes a tiempo completo en universidad sin fines de lucro.

Limitaciones: se necesitan más investigaciones actuales sobre los estigmas y los desafíos de obtener un doctorado en una universidad con fines de lucro o totalmente en línea. Más diálogos académicos de la literatura podrían haber enriquecido el estudio.

Palabras clave: educación en línea, doctorados en línea, universidades con ánimo de lucro, estudiantes de doctorado afro-americanos, universidades en línea, Universidad Walden, Universidad de Phoenix, Universidad Capella.

Resumo

Introdução: A Walden University, a Capella University e a University of Phoenix produzem muitos doutores afro-americanos, de acordo com *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*.

Problema: Embora essas universidades formem muitos estudantes de minorias com doutorado, elas contribuem significativamente para a dívida de empréstimos estudantis. Essas universidades com diplomas on-line são propriedade de organizações com fins lucrativos. Devido a essa classificação, estas universidades e os seus graus de doutoramento carregam estigmas no ensino superior que podem dificultar as oportunidades

para professores afro-americanos e outras minorias em universidades de investigação de elite, emblemáticas do estado e de prestígio.

Objectivo: A investigação visa formular estratégias para ajudar os afro-americanos a terem mais conhecimento sobre a selecção de programas de doutoramento não tradicionais e os estigmas actuais de obter um doutoramento numa universidade totalmente online ou com fins lucrativos. O objetivo não é diminuir as realizações de qualquer pessoa com intelecto, coragem e talento para obter um diploma de doutorado credenciado regionalmente. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo educar e capacitar estudantes afro-americanos e outros estudantes negros na tomada de decisões de doutorado e discutir estigmas contra doutorados de universidades com fins lucrativos e universidades totalmente online nos EUA.

Método: A abordagem utilizada foi a análise de conteúdo da literatura e entrevistas qualitativas com abordagem de pesquisa fenomenológica. O objetivo não é menosprezar ou demonizar os licenciados e diplomas de programas de doutoramento online acreditados regionalmente e oferecidos por universidades com fins lucrativos, porque eles proporcionaram oportunidades e acesso à formação doutoral. O objectivo é partilhar a realidade dos estigmas actuais dos diplomas dessas universidades nas comunidades académicas das universidades mais bem classificadas. O objetivo final seria educá-los sobre a importância da escolha da escola, mesmo que a única opção viável para concluir o doutoramento seja um programa de doutoramento online ou híbrido.

Resultados: As carreiras académicas dependem muitas vezes da existência de um doutoramento e da universidade que o concede. Portanto, os afro-americanos e outros estudantes negros deveriam fazer suas pesquisas e escolher universidades tradicionais com programas de doutorado online e híbridos, que muitas vezes são vistos de forma mais favorável. Este estudo fornece uma compreensão global precisa dos desafios e estigmas dos doutorados afro-americanos, motivados pelo local onde obtêm o seu doutoramento.

Conclusão: Este projeto busca mudar o comportamento das práticas de seleção e modificação de programas de doutorado que tornariam os graduados mais bem-sucedidos e favoráveis para cargos docentes em tempo integral após a formatura.

Originalidade: A lacuna na literatura explorada é a discussão académica limitada sobre como frequentar e concluir um doutorado em uma dessas universidades pode ser prejudicial para os afro-americanos, especialmente se eles estiverem interessados em carreiras docentes em período integral e com estabilidade permanente em universidades sem fins lucrativos .

Limitações: São necessárias pesquisas mais atuais sobre os estigmas e desafios de obter um doutorado em uma universidade com fins lucrativos ou totalmente online. Mais diálogos académicos da literatura poderiam ter enriquecido o estudo.

Palavras-chave: educação online, doutorados online, universidades com fins lucrativos, estudantes de doutorado afro-americanos, universidades online, Universidade Walden, Universidade de Phoenix, Universidade Capella.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although non-traditional doctorates have played a significant role in producing African-Americans and other minorities with doctorate degrees, they have also contributed significantly to the amount of student debt. Walden University was the top school on the list responsible for the highest student loan debt, with \$756,336,024. The third

school on the list was the University of Phoenix, with \$439,078,509; number six was Capella University, with \$ 399,450,066 [2]. Along with the high expense of doctorate programs offered by totally on-line universities, for-profit universities, and non-traditional universities owned by for-profit entities, graduates of these programs often face stigma and limited opportunities for a full-time teaching track and full-time tenure track opportunities at Carnegie classified research one and research two universities.

Capella University (34), Capital Technology University (13), and Walden University (8) were the top three U.S. producers of doctoral degrees in Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services for African-Americans in 2020 [1]. Capital Technology University is the only traditional brick-and-mortar university. The remainder is on-line for-profit institutions, for-profit universities, or universities owned by for-profit organizations. Walden University (139), Northcentral University (79), University of Phoenix-Arizona (57), and Capella University (29) were the top four U.S. business doctoral degree producers for African-Americans [1]. These are for-profit on-line institutions or universities owned by for-profit organizations. Walden University (92), Capella University (28), and Georgia Southern University (28) were the top three U.S. public health doctoral degree producers for African-Americans (16). Georgia Southern University is a typical brick-and-mortar university; the remainder is on-line for-profit universities or universities owned by for-profit organizations. Walden University (100), University of Southern California (52), and Capella University (37) were the top three U.S. producers of Ph.D. degrees in Public Administration and Social Service Professions in 2020, according to Transnational Issues in Higher Education [1]. These figures show how non-traditional doctoral programs help African-Americans get doctorates and raise student loan debt, especially for students of color.

One-fifth, or \$6.5 billion, of the U.S. government's graduate and doctorate student loans, went to 20 universities [2]. However, those colleges only teach 12% of graduate and doctoral graduates [2]. Walden University had the most student loan debt at \$756,336,024. Third on the list was the University of Phoenix, with \$439,078,509; sixth was Capella University, with \$399,450,066 [2]. These universities are on-line, for-profit, or owned by for-profit corporations.

This inquiry is significant because Black and African-American bachelor's degree holders have an average of \$52,000 in student loan debt [30]. More significantly, 45% of the student loan debt for Black borrowers is from graduate school loans [30]. Over 50% of Black student borrowers report that their net worth is less than they owe in student loan debt. Black and African-American college graduates owe an average of \$25,000 more in student loan debt than White college graduates [30], so completing a doctorate program that can cost \$60,000 to \$100,000 can represent a significant

financial risk, especially if the completion of the degree from the for-profit or totally on-line institution is not highly respected or valued by the institutions. Keywords used in the literature review included stigmas of on-line doctorates, stigmas of doctorates from for-profit universities, student loan debt by race, university faculty diversity, and challenges for African-American faculty. Databases used in the search include Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

2. Contexts from the literature

These non-traditional Ph.D. programs have disrupted the market by persuading established brick-and-mortar colleges to offer on-line and hybrid doctoral programs. For-profit and on-line universities contribute to student debt beyond exorbitant tuition. Student complaints, government sanctions, and litigation have plagued some of these on-line for-profit universities. Many leading on-line universities that are for-profit or operated by an on-line corporation have settled with the U.S. Department of Education because many misleadingly recruit and violate state laws. Many students can seek a “borrower defense to loan repayment” to erase some or all of their federal student loan debt [3].

Walden University is being sued for misrepresenting advanced degree expenses and credits and targeting minority, first- and second-generation college students. These students need more information regarding college options, accreditations, and university classifications. In a federal lawsuit filed in Maryland, Walden is accused of purposely delaying doctoral research projects, not delivering timely or comprehensive project reviews, pushing students to re-enroll for additional semesters, and imposing course requirements [4]. The claim estimates that the institution overcharged students by over \$28.5 million [4].

Since postal mail correspondence courses, distance learning has become popular in academia. Modern learning technology tools have made on-line learning a popular alternative to face-to-face classes [5]. On-line learning, especially from for-profit and fully on-line universities, is still stigmatized despite advances [5]. On-line degrees are considered “less trustworthy” than in-person degrees [5].

On-line degree programs can promote diversity and inclusion by cutting prices, allowing students of color to get doctorates, and attracting non-traditional students who cannot attend residential programs [5]. Nevertheless, fully on-line and for-profit doctoral degrees are sometimes deemed less respectable because of an assumption of lesser quality of students and university priorities that put profit over academic rigor.

On-line degree programs are stigmatized, hindering academic success, employability, and career advancement [5]. A study outlined that 57.7% of faculty at traditional campus-based universities felt “more fear than excitement” about the speed, growth, and prevalence of on-line degree programs, especially at traditional brick-and-mortar universities [5, 6].

A study surveyed 208 deans and department or division chairs from universities and colleges in the southeastern United States about their perception of faculty who had earned their doctoral degrees on-line [7]. Data showed only a slightly negative perception of on-line learning, but over three-fourths of respondents would hire a candidate with a traditional doctorate over one with a totally on-line degree [8].

Survey results of U.S. faculty in management departments at institutions accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) showed that 90% would not hire someone with a totally on-line degree for a tenure-track faculty position [9]. Universities accredited by Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) include the highest ranked, most prestigious, and highest paying business schools in the U.S.

2.1 Research Universities

The most prominent issue is transitioning from Ph.D. student to full-time teaching track or tenure track faculty in a research-level one university. Research 1 universities fulfill Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education standards for research activity and spending [10]. Research expenditures, research doctorates issued, and research productivity in research dollars and other academic activity drive the classification’s ten indicators [10]. High-level research enhances the classroom experience by providing students with cutting-edge, real-world examples that increase knowledge in their study fields [10].

Research 1 institutions are regarded as prestigious, provide more faculty support, offer the most benefits to faculty, and pay faculty the most. Duke, Northwestern, Syracuse, John Hopkins, and UNC-Chapel Hill are examples of this type of university. A 2022 study of research level one colleges in North Carolina, Maryland, and Washington DC found no full-time tenure-track faculty with a degree from an on-line or for-profit university. These data indicate that African-Americans seeking a non-traditional Ph.D. should choose their program carefully and be more discriminating and cautious about the university’s reputation if an on-line or hybrid option is available. The evidence is in the academic backgrounds of faculty at leading U.S. universities. News & World Report or the Q.S. World University Rankings: USA or the Financial Times World University

Rankings do not include graduates from for-profit universities or on-line for-profit universities.

2.2 Stigma

One of the definitions of the word “stigma” that is considered to be the most accurate is “an attribute that is very untrustworthy” [11, p. 3]. A person is considered to have a stigma attached to them if others believe that they should have particular qualities or if it is perceived that they have attributes that directly oppose their social identity [11]. Because of this, stigma is not just the product of a negative quality; instead, it is an unwanted deviation from the norms that society has established for an individual. According to Elliot et al. definition from 1982, stigma can be defined as “a divergence from the norm that, if revealed, encourages other individuals to designate the individual as illegitimate.” Elliot and his colleagues provided us with this definition. Each of these labels carries the possibility of social isolation and disrespect [12].

A 1998 study [13] concluded that stigma is connected to an individual’s social identity. This occurs when it is believed that the individual possesses a characteristic that reduces their worth in various social contexts. Because of this stigmatized feature, the individual is frequently associated with a group or category of people held in lower esteem in many social circumstances [14]. When it comes to defining stigma and making sense of it, Crocker et al. [13] placed a significant emphasis on the role of context, which is in opposition to the beliefs that were prevalent in the past. Because an individual’s unique attribute may diminish the worth of their social identity in one scenario but not in another, the circumstance is crucial for forming a stigma [14]. As a result, stigma can be seen as a situational risk, which takes place when an individual’s trait causes harm to the way the individual is perceived or appraised in a particular social milieu [14]. These concepts highlight the role of unfavorable social judgment in forming stigma, whether it is others’ beliefs of illegitimacy or a lowered social or professional position for the individual in question [14].

Study [13] proposed a plausible explanation for stigma formation by identifying three primary functions responsible for the process. The primary function of stigma was to satisfy the need for self or in-group improvement. This was accomplished by passing judgment on others in a derogatory manner to improve one’s own sense of self-worth or the group’s identity as a whole [13]. Second, there is a possibility that stigma originated as a justification for the social class system that already existed in society, which led to people in higher social positions stigmatizing those in lower social positions to keep their privileges [13]. Stigma is characterized by attributing negative

notions and stereotypes to a group because that group is regarded as substandard compared to social norms or separate from those norms [13]. There are several manifestations of stigma, the two most frequent of which are institutionalized stigma and internalized stigma [14].

2.3 The stigma that is perceived

A stigmatized person may also expect to be excluded from and discriminated against by the rest of society, which is another meaning of the phrase “perceived stigma” [14]. [11] addressed the discomfort stigmatized people feel when interacting with non-stigmatized individuals who are not privy to the judgments being inwardly passed on them, even though the stigmatized individual can feel such judgments.

2.4 The stigma that is embedded in institutions

Institutionalized stigma occurs when organizations and groups treat people differently, limiting their resources and opportunities [14]. [14] defines stigma as actions, behaviors, policies, and conventions that limit opportunities and intentionally restrict the mobility or consideration of stigmatized people.

Characteristics classify people. By doing so, we classify persons likely to be encountered in social contexts, which helps us conceive their “social identity.” Based on our categorizations, we construct these characteristics into assumptions of how the person ought to be [11]. As a result, the stigmatized person becomes self-conscious about how they come across to others and the standards, and they try to calculate what impression they are giving off [11].

Stigma may result from an identifying mark that places a person in a morally difficult position compared to society [14]. Stigma is how society labels people based on their behaviors, social situations, and traits [14]. These characteristics can shape an individual’s professional and social identity, contributing to social stigma. The stigma links an individual’s traits and archetype [14].

As [15] explained, stigmatized people feel like they are always “on” because they question their own traits and feel less important. This increases stigmatization. Questioning one’s own attributes creates a gap between self-imposed standards and self-identity [11].

3.0 Data collection and results

This study used phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and a method. Philosophy's phenomenology studies human experience [16]. Phenomenology "reduces individual encounters with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence," according to [17, p. 58]. After gathering data, the researcher will describe the individual-phenomenon connection [17]. This recruitment strategy met the study's sample size of ten, which is sufficient for a qualitative investigation [16, 18, 19]. The sample size met phenomenological research and data saturation standards [16, 17, 18, 19]. [20] defines "data saturation" in qualitative research as having enough data for replication, no new data, and no more codes. Given the scope of this research, an inquiry into people's actual experiences rather than their views would be crucial.

This research relied on interviews. Qualitative interviews can provide ample data saturation when there are ten or more participants [16, 18, 19, 20]. Qualitative research must use the "qualitative context" [21, p. 213] to confirm its findings, not quantitative research rules [21]. Qualitative research focuses on reliability, coherence, and applicability rather than validity [16, 18, 19, 21].

An e-mail screening process determined candidate eligibility, confirmed verbally at the interview. Questions were asked of potential participants to assess if they met the study requirements. This study included eighteen persons. 18 African-American Ph.D. alums were interviewed to learn how the stigma of for-profit or totally on-line education has hindered their careers; Capella University (4 participants), University of Phoenix (5 participants), and Walden University (9 participants). Participants had doctorates for more than two years and they had over ten years of work experience in their Doctorate research field. LinkedIn was used to recruit participants for the study. All the participants felt that they were under-employed based on their significant work experience and having a doctorate. They were asked how their degree-granting institution had stigmatized them.

Themes are codes or classifications that help researchers analyze data [22]. Coding is distilling a participant's experience into one word or phrase. The researcher must continuously study the text and its labeling (codes) to accurately understand the participants' experiences during coding [16, 18, 19]. Codes were evaluated and improved by developing repeating themes across coding.

Saldaña [23] advocates using member checks to verify qualitative research findings. Member checks verify participant testimony [16, 18, 19, 23]. After each interview, participants were asked if they were available to discuss the transcribed version over the phone or on-line. Review transcripts were e-mailed to participants. Participants were asked to check transcripts. Member checks confirmed that the codes and

themes assigned to large chunks of the participants' testimonies accurately reflected their research experiences.

The study implemented inter-rater (inter-coder) checks to reduce the risk of incorrect data analysis findings [24]. After reviewing the same data, the researcher and rater(s) should agree on code assignment. This technique added a peer review mechanism using data evaluators outside the research to verify data authenticity and quality [16, 18, 19]. After transcription and coding, inter-rater reliability (IRR) was calculated. IRR's secondary coders verified the researcher's data interpretation and code assignment. One IRR analysis level is shown below.

Percentage of Agreement Equation

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Number of agreements} + \text{Disagreements}}$$

(McAlister et al. 2017)

The themes that emerged from the interviews and coding process were as follows:

Theme 1: Misinformation about the differences in perception and opportunities of doctoral programs and universities. Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information. (18 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

Accumulating evidence suggests that African-American doctoral students need more support in learning to effectively search for and evaluate programs, especially when they are the first generation to go to college.

To elaborate, a participant stated, "I thought because my degree was from a regionally accredited university from the same regionally accreditation organization that approved schools like the University of Michigan and Ohio State, that my degree would be perceived on a similar level."

Another participant stated, "I just kept hearing about the shortage of African-American men in academia, that I would have an overwhelming amount of job opportunities for tenure track and full-time faculty jobs. I applied to and reached out to every major state university in my state and could not land one full-time job. I did not even get one interview."

An additional participant stated, "I have over 25 years of management experience in the military, the federal government, and private industry. Getting my doctorate would be all I needed to get a full-time faculty job. I applied for three years and couldn't

get an adjunct faculty job. I applied for more than 40 full-time faculty jobs and did not even get one interview. I actually ended up going to another university to get a second doctorate degree to overcome the lack of opportunities that were offered to me because I went to a for-profit university.”

Another participant said, “I knew the University of Phoenix was not Harvard University or Georgetown, but I never knew they felt that people that graduated from those universities would view my university and my degree so negatively. After not having luck finding a full-time academic job, I started researching the University of Phoenix and read so many news stories of scandals with the University of Phoenix that included them being barred from recruiting on military bases. I even learned of a case that was filed in 2019 against the University of Phoenix for allegedly deceiving customers with advertisements that fraudulently promoted, among other things, employment opportunities for the university’s graduates. I wish I had done my research before, but I decided to attend the university. I took out more than \$70,000 of student loans to complete my degree.”

Theme 2: Lack of information- Lack of knowledge or education on a given subject (18 out of 18 mentioned this concept).

One participant said, “ I did not know how much perceptions and pedigree mattered for faculty jobs at the top universities in my area. I thought my extensive work experience would carry more weight than it did. After completing my doctorate, I actually spent \$50,000 and time getting an additional Master’s degree on-line for a top university to attempt to make me a more attractive applicant to some top universities. It still did not help me get a full-time teaching job at a prestigious research university, but I could get a faculty job at a teaching university. When I was picking a doctoral program, I never realized that I should have been looking on the websites of the universities where I wanted to teach at to review the faculty bios to see what kind of universities their faculty attended.”

Another participant stated, “I was very ignorant about the culture of academia. I did not even know the difference between corporate and academic resumes. I never knew how vital academic scholarship was related to peer-reviewed publishing and peer-reviewed conference presentations. I just learned that the academic profession is framed by the idea that what an academic does primarily rests in two domains, teaching, and research. After applying for full-time jobs with no luck for three years, a colleague that I met on LinkedIn told me about organizations like the Black Doctoral Network and Blacks in Higher Education. I attended both of their conferences and learned things about academic culture and academia that I wish I had known before I

started my doctorate program. I also learned about the Chronicle of Higher Education and began reading it from cover to cover weekly. Any person of color considering going into academia and getting a doctorate should start reading the Chronicle of Higher Education and attend academic conferences.”

Another participant stated, “I was surprised to find out how important having peer-reviewed publications from journals and conference proceedings was to make you competitive for academic jobs. As I started to apply for full-time academic faculty jobs, many of the application requirements requested peer-reviewed articles and statements of research interest. I did not know how to publish in a peer-reviewed journal or what a statement of research interest looked like. I was never taught about those things in my on-line doctoral program. Still, I had friends who went to traditional Ph.D. programs and learned about those things as doctoral students.”

Another participant stated, “I never realized that by having a doctorate from a for-profit on-line university, faculty search committees would automatically assume that I went to that university because I could not be admitted to a higher-ranked university. I did not know other universities were an option for me. The for-profit university was the better place for me, and they wanted me because they kept calling and e-mailing me. In contrast, universities like George Washington University and George Mason University barely followed up with me. I did not understand that for-profit universities function like a business and had salespeople in admissions who had jobs to sell me on attending their doctoral program.”

An additional participant said, “I did not know what to look for in a doctoral program. I did not even know what was important in picking a doctorate degree. I entered my doctoral program not knowing anything about academic research and academic writing. I was unsure how to pick a dissertation topic or write a problem statement, and my program did not do a good job of helping me with that process.”

Theme 3: Dismissiveness- Dismissiveness is behavior that implies that someone or their qualifications are worth serious consideration: (16 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

A participant stated, “I would send in my application for faculty employment, and within a few days after the job advertisement would close, I would receive a rejection letter. This would happen even for faculty jobs where I was certain I satisfied all the requirements. Every time I applied for a job, I was met with rejection after rejection, a sort of denial in which my capacity to perform the job at an exceptional level was aggressively dismissed because of the institution I attended. It took me a year and a

half to get an adjunct job. It took me three years to get a full-time faculty job, but it was not a large research university; it was at a local community college.”

Another participant stated, “I got feedback that made me quickly understand that because I had my doctorate from an on-line university, I would never be considered a serious applicant for a full-time job at the colleges in my area that paid the highest salaries. I often do not get a chance even to interview or do a teaching demonstration because my candidacy is dismissed because of where I went to school.”

Theme 4: Underemployment- Underemployment means underusing a person’s skills, knowledge, and expertise, or even people functioning in jobs that seem lesser or lower to their education about abilities. (16 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

A participant stated, “I just felt that I could not get job opportunities that I should have been able to get with having a doctorate and all the work experience that I had. I would look at the profiles of people with doctorates from my university who had jobs that seemed less of what they should be or on a lower level than where they should have been. It did not seem right to me that someone with a doctorate was only a department manager at Target. So many people with profiles on LinkedIn that went to the University of Phoenix, Walden University, Northcentral University, and Capella University were not in full tenure track faculty roles at major research universities. I saw some with teaching experience and publications find full-time jobs at teaching universities.”

Theme 5: Disappointment and Frustration (16 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

A participant stated, “It was frustrating and disappointing to work so hard to complete my doctorate only not to have any doors open for me. I have been applying for faculty jobs for almost three years without any success. I have only gotten one interview.”

Another participant said, “Many colleagues have been so frustrated with trying to get a full-time job at academia that they stopped applying and have focused on starting their own businesses as consultants or listing themselves as a CEO of their companies. They are writing life coaching, self-help, and memoir books. Although it seems productive on the surface, it often seems more like an effort to save face or project an image of great success because they are frustrated that they have been unable to do more than they have with their doctorate degrees.”

Theme 6: Weak influential networks (14 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

A participant stated, “I graduated with my doctorate but did not have faculty from my doctoral program that could help me get a full-time faculty job. I did not have an

academic mentor to teach me about what academia was like or how to transition into academia. I could have benefited from a mentor or a network of professionals who could coach or advise me on the work activities I should be doing to make me more attractive as a full-time faculty member. I could have benefited from having colleagues to publish academic articles with and present with at academic conferences.”

Another participant stated, “I borrowed nearly 100k to complete my doctorate in my on-line program. It took almost seven years to finish my doctorate because I was not getting the coaching, guidance, and support I needed to pick a viable dissertation topic, academic writing, and academic research. I had no idea how even to write my dissertation chapter one.”

Another participant said, “I was my family’s first generation to attend college. No one in my family had an undergraduate degree. I did not have family members or a network of people who could guide me in picking the right university and program. I had many classmates in my on-line program that looked like me and had a similar background to me, so we had a level of camaraderie, but many of my classmates have faced the same struggles with finishing their doctorates and with full-time job opportunities in academia.”

Theme 7: Worry (12 out of 18 mentioned this concept)

One participant stated, “I worry about how I will pay back all my student loans. My student loan debt for all of my education is over \$286,000. I wanted to retire from my government job, transition into a full-time faculty job, and have the income to pay my loans. I am still determining if I will be able to because I have yet to secure a faculty job. I feel embarrassed and foolish to have spent all this time and money to get a doctorate, only to have my doctorate degree viewed as inferior or questionable.”

Another participant stated, “I have concerns that I will never be able to contribute to the learning and development of others like I had dreamed of as a university faculty member because people in traditional academic communities do not like where I got my doctorate from. I cannot even get a full-time job at an HBCU. They would rather select a faculty member from outside of the U.S. who is not connected to the mission or even understands the history and importance of HBCUs in developing African-American professionals. I have been at academic conferences and seen many of the faculty present in ways that are not compelling and engaging, whereas I have made presentations that run circles around their presentation skills. I feel that they are getting the opportunities that I am not because they got their doctorate at a university that is perceived better than mine.”

4.0 Conclusions and Discussions

These statistics lead to the crucial notion that African-Americans and other members of color need to do their research when selecting a non-traditional Ph.D. program. Other members of color also need to complete their research. This choice should include a clear understanding that obtaining a doctorate from a totally on-line for-profit university, a for-profit university, or a university owned by a for-profit entity could be more expensive than other non-traditional options. Additionally, this choice could limit opportunities to teach full-time or even on-line as an adjunct at the most highly ranked universities, which pay the highest faculty salaries and offer the most benefits. Thus, there are several critical considerations and planning measures that African-American and other minority doctorate students should consider while selecting a non-traditional doctoral program. These factors and methods are included below. A graduate with the appropriate degree from the appropriate university is like a passport; it can take them to new locations and open doors that doctoral students never even knew existed [8].

According to [8], individuals thinking about pursuing a doctorate should self-reflect to understand their reasons and motivations for wanting to pursue a doctorate. Some of the advice that [8] offers includes the following:

- Do not pursue a doctorate simply because you are enamored with the idea of people calling you a doctor.
- Obtaining a degree will not compel people to respect you; hence, finishing a doctorate will not alleviate feelings of insecurity or imposter syndrome.
- If you want to learn more, improve yourself, and become more knowledgeable in your field, you might consider earning a doctorate degree.
- If you want more employment opportunities in academia, consulting, and other complicated organizations, getting a doctorate will help you acquire advanced research and critical thinking skills, so you should pursue this degree.
- Having a doctorate sets graduates apart from applicants with only a master's degree, making them more competitive for high-level job opportunities in industry, government, and non-profit organizations. This is because a doctorate is the highest level of education that can be earned.
- If you have a passion or interest in conducting research and sharing your findings with the world as a Ph.D. student or a graduate of a doctoral program, you should consider pursuing a doctoral degree.

- If you want to help others and bring about positive social change, getting a doctorate can give you a platform that will allow your voice and ideas to be heard more clearly and develop them further.
- Once you have completed your doctoral studies, what do you plan to do with your degree, and what other steps are necessary to take outside attending classes and receiving your degree?

Research before enrolling is crucial. A university that chases you may not be the correct one. For-profit universities sometimes use high-pressure sales tactics to recruit minority students [2]. Research 1 and 2 universities spend less on advertising and recruit fewer doctorate candidates than for-profit colleges. Doctoral candidates should research universities and faculty. The research process should also include checking faculty profiles at the university you might want to teach at after graduation to discover what kind of university they attended, what associations they are members of, what conferences they attend, what publications they have, and what journals do they publish in.

The most crucial factor is choosing a typical university with a campus where students attend classes and a non-traditional doctoral program. On-line or hybrid working adult doctoral programs from traditional brick-and-mortar colleges have the advantage that some hiring stakeholders are more likely to pay more attention to applications and credentials from non-traditional doctorates [8]. Doctoral programs at Carnegie Foundation research level one or level two universities are preferred.

These considerations should be paramount if the program is on-line or hybrid.

1. What is the university's academic reputation?
2. Is the university a brick-and-mortar university?
3. Is the university regionally accredited and essential to most highly valued U.S. universities?
4. What are the doctoral completion rates?
5. What is the average time of completion?
6. What does the program cost and what are the funding options?
7. What are the admissions process and acceptance rates for admissions?
8. What are the degree requirements and required courses, and do any of them present any challenges for you? (i.e., statistics or quantitative methods)

Books that can help with this process include *Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning an M.A. or a Ph.D.* [25] and *The Realities of Completing*

a *Ph.D.: How to Plan for Success* [26], which outline the critical aspects of choosing a program, applying, and an understanding of the process. These books also explain the importance of writing a solid application statement and preparing for the doctoral admissions interview which is a significant as preparing for a job interview in terms of knowing your “Why” and being clear about how you want to use your education to impact others or engage in constructive community change.

Traditional U.S. universities with some respectable on-line and hybrid non-traditional doctoral options include:

- Louisiana State University Shreveport, USA
- Bradley University, IL, USA
- Vanderbilt University, USA
- Old Dominion University, USA
- The University of the Cumberlands, USA
- Indiana State University, USA
- Bowling Green University, USA
- Marymount University in Arlington, VA, USA
- Gonzaga University, WA, USA
- East Carolina University, USA
- Dakota State University, USA
- The George Washington University, USA
- University of North Carolina A & T, USA
- Morgan State University, USA
- Capitol Technology University, USA
- Nebraska Methodist College, USA
- Lancaster Bible College and Graduate Seminary, PA, USA

4.1 Doctoral topic selection

Most students should come into a program without a topic and draft of a problem that needs to be researched. Once a program is selected, creating a success plan that includes finding a dissertation topic during the first semester is critical.

The dissertation problem must be empirical rather than theoretical. That sentence means you need a statistic or measure to demonstrate that a problem exists. A problem statement should be supported by references from the last five years or newer that outline the specific statistic or statistic that clearly outlines a problem worthy of study [27]. What tends to happen is that researchers often have an opinion or

experience on a topic. Their view of the problem is significantly based on their thoughts, personal experiences, observations, or feelings [27]. Personal opinions, observations, and experiences cannot drive the dissertation topic or the dissertation study [27]. If there is not a statistic or trend with a reference from the last five years or newer that clearly shows that this is an actual problem, this could indicate that the dissertation topic being considered is not a viable topic or that more time should be spent reading more research on this topic [27].

This problem statement should be no more than 5 to 7 sentences in total and should include all of the following:

- An introduction statement about the nature of the topic with a reference.
- A statistic regarding the topic.
- The specific problem that you want to address.
- The gap in the literature you are filling that you want to address and explain how your study will be different, more updated, or more relevant than what has been previously done.

4.2 Importance of scholarly activities as a doctoral student

The second element is developing an academic development plan that includes a project plan for dissertation writing and a plan for academic peer-reviewed publishing and conference presenting while functioning as a doctoral student. Academic scholarship is critical to have more career options while completing a non-traditional doctorate [8]. Presenting at academic conferences as a doctoral student helps build confidence, introduces critical academic contacts that can help with career opportunities, and allows presenting dissertation topics in venues that offer constructive feedback. Completing a doctorate from a traditional doctorate and academic scholarship is a critical aspect of preparation as a doctoral student [8].

Applied research can get published. Many journals will take the same papers doctoral, and graduate students submitted, for graduate and doctoral classes can be published as long as they have references and are in APA format as conceptual papers. Doctoral students and professional colleagues work full time and are students that every new project or program develops at work. These projects could become publishable articles, as case studies, if the following are performed: document the steps that occurred starting the project and the challenges faced, change the name of the organization to a mock name for privacy reasons, and go out and find peer-reviewed

articles as references that explain what occurred in developing the program or project in academic terms that use models and theories that apply to the action that was taken [8]. [28] and [29] are books that are critical to turning academic papers into peer-reviewed journal publications.

4.3 Final thoughts

The intent of this paper is **NOT** to diminish or demonize graduates and degrees from regionally accredited on-line doctorate programs offered by for-profit universities because they have provided opportunities and access to doctoral education. The intent of this study is **NOT** to diminish the tremendous accomplishment of completing a doctorate or to discourage African-Americans that have the courage, intellect, and ability to complete a doctorate even if they have attended a regionally accredited for-profit or totally on-line university. The goal is to educate and share the realities of the current stigmas of those degrees in academic communities at the most highly-ranked universities to empower African-American students and other students of color in their doctoral decision-making. There are many options out there for on-line and hybrid education [31]. It is essential to encourage students of color to do their research and not just choose a doctorate program because the institutions are in an aggressive contact mode. This is because for-profit universities often function as sales-oriented businesses, and students of color must be encouraged to do their research [4]. Significant weight should be given to the academic institution where the doctorate was earned [8]. It is essential to select the appropriate academic program from the appropriate university to have the most effective alternatives after graduation. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to prioritize brick-and-mortar universities that also offer non-traditional programs always at the top of the selection list of programs [8]. African-Americans should exercise significant caution and pause before seriously considering attending a completely on-line, for-profit university or an on-line doctorate program offered by a university owned by a for-profit entity. These programs are typically expensive and still have some acceptance stigmas in terms of how their doctorate degrees are viewed [7, 9, 8]. Even if the doctorate is earned in a non-traditional fashion, the academic profile and academic resume of the graduate should include experiences and activities resembling those of a graduate of a traditional doctorate program. This can be accomplished by selecting a research topic that has a good chance of success within the program's first year and by participating in scholarly activities such as publishing work and presenting at academic conferences that have been subjected to peer review [8].

5.0 Recommendations for future research

It would be an interesting study to conduct with faculty selection committees to determine how many more applicants with doctorates from totally on-line universities and for-profit universities would get more opportunities to interview for full-time tenure track faculty jobs if the names of the universities of all applicants were redacted and applicants were evaluated based solely on all qualifications. Such a study would be interesting because it would help determine how many more applicants with doctorates from totally on-line universities and for-profit universities would get more opportunities to interview for full-time tenure-track faculty jobs.

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