

Doctoral Degrees

The PhD is not only an exploration of the knowledge in a given discipline but also an original contribution to it. To the extent that doctoral education has been successful, the student's relationship to learning is significantly changed. Having made a discovery, developed an insight, tested a theory, or designed an application, the PhD recipient is no longer a student but a colleague of the faculty. It is for this reason that the PhD is the highest degree offered by a university.

The core mission of PhD programs at research universities is to educate the future faculty of other research universities and institutions of higher education. Graduates of Washington University participate in research and teaching; they also make valuable contributions to society by applying the analytical and creative skills required for scholarship to careers in business, government, and nonprofit sectors. The Graduate School therefore works with other university offices to ensure that students have the opportunity to develop these transferable skills.

Among the critical components the university provides for these purposes are a small and select graduate student body, faculty members dedicated to scholarly work, and the physical facilities needed for research. In these regards Washington University compares favorably to the finest graduate institutions in the world. But the key ingredients of PhD completion must be provided by the student: a love of learning and a desire to increase the sum of human knowledge. Motivation and perseverance are prerequisites for success in PhD programs.