

Your Capella University
Doctoral Guide



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

GET STARTED ►

Introduction

Pursuing a doctoral degree is often described as a journey.

The path is marked with steep climbs and satisfying vistas. Some steps require expert assistance. Other steps require self-reliance and internal motivation. The route can vary greatly, of course, depending on a student's pace, preferences, and persistence. But reaching the end of the doctoral journey always brings a sense of fulfillment and reward.

The first step in the journey is preparation: in this case, getting familiar and comfortable with your options regarding the degree you want, the type of program that fits your life, the costs you can manage, and the time you can spare. What's more, you'll need to understand how the degree can help you meet your personal and professional goals.

This guide answers basic questions about PhDs and professional doctorates and examines the differences between online and traditional doctoral programs. It also explores the challenges of work/life/school balance and other issues encountered by doctoral students. Read on to see if the doctoral path—and its end point—is for you.

Choosing the road less traveled

A doctoral degree is not for everyone. Less than [2 percent of adults](#) 25 years and older living in the US have a doctoral degree. But choosing the road less traveled is often the only way to reach amazing destinations.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Alumni Testimonials

“I'm a different, more impactful, and self-aware person because of my doctoral journey. ... I would not be who I am today if I did not experience this growth through my Capella journey. I'm ecstatic to have achieved this life-changing goal!

Christina Frye

PhD in Human Services

Actual Capella learner who agreed to appear in Capella promotional materials.

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*Is a doctoral degree
right for me?*

Not quite sure if you're up for the challenge of getting a doctoral degree?

Consider how you would answer the following four questions.

1 *Do you have a desire to become an expert in your field?*
Does your desire to be an expert in your field outweigh your fears and hesitations? Do you find yourself excited about the prospect of years of learning?

2 *Are you motivated to persevere?*
Completing a PhD or professional doctorate requires you to have enthusiasm, optimism, and dedication. Ask yourself if you have the necessary discipline and stamina to carry you through a journey that will involve both highs and lows.

3 *How comfortable are you with time management?*
A doctoral program is an intense and time-consuming effort. Do you enjoy multitasking? Can you handle multiple challenges and activities at the same time? Will you be able to balance your studies with your career and personal obligations?

4 *How will you finance your doctoral program?*
It's essential to have a plan for completing a doctoral degree from a financial perspective. How will you pay for your education? Can you secure financial support or loans? Research what you can expect to earn after graduation, and determine how you will repay any loans.



What's it like to be a doctoral student?

Choosing to pursue a doctoral degree is a big step. Taking that step can be easier if you know what you're getting into.

We have created a resource that helps you understand what to expect as a doctoral student. Our online guide [The Doctoral Journey](#) provides information about:

- Choosing your program
- Online learning
- Researching, writing, and critical-thinking
- Residencies
- Taking exams
- Completing final projects

Plus, graduates offer inside information about their experiences and keys to success to help you proceed with confidence.

Learn more about what it's like to be a [doctoral student](#).



Why would I earn a doctoral degree?

Reasons why people pursue doctoral degrees:



TEACH
at the college or university level.



CONSULT
in your field of practice.



PURSUE
research in a selected area.



ADVANCE
in your specialization or field.

But you also might consider pursuing a doctoral degree to:



BOOST
your career.



BECOME
a subject matter expert.



FEEL
a sense of achievement.

“ Alumni Testimonials

Yes, earning a doctorate is a financial investment and requires a time commitment. However, I believe the outcome of earning the highest level of degree in a field you plan to serve indefinitely is an invaluable accomplishment that outweighs both time and money.

Stephanie Johnson

Doctor of Education (EdD)

Actual Capella learner who agreed to appear in Capella promotional materials.

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*What is the difference
between a PhD and
professional doctorate?*

Understand your doctoral options

All doctoral graduates at Capella University are scholar-practitioners—equipped with an understanding of foundational theory and how it directly applies to the current and future needs of their professions, as well as the skills and knowledge to research, teach, consult, and lead.

The primary difference between PhD and professional doctorate programs is the type of research conducted in the independent research phase.

PhD students are expected to extend the body of knowledge in their field to solve for a real-world problem in their workplace or community. PhD students demonstrate this through a dissertation.

Professional doctorate students are expected to apply existing knowledge in their field to a real-world problem in their workplace or community. Professional doctorate students demonstrate this through a doctoral capstone, comprised of a paper, product, or portfolio.

	PhD	Professional doctorate
Degree focus	Contribute new knowledge aimed at solving real-world problems.	Apply existing knowledge aimed at solving real-world problems.
Independent research project	Conduct primary research to inform a five-chapter dissertation.	Use existing research to inform a five-chapter applied dissertation or paper, product, or portfolio.

PhD or professional doctorate: start with your motivations

Ultimately, deciding whether to pursue a PhD or professional doctorate in your field of study should start with understanding your personal and professional goals. How do you plan to apply your degree, and what kind of research most interests you?

Use these questions to guide your self-reflection.

- What do you hope to do?
- Where do you hope to apply your education?
- What type of research do you want to do?
- Which degree is required or expected in your desired profession or organization?



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*Available PhD and
professional doctoral
programs*

Capella offers a wide range of doctoral degree programs

The goals that motivate individuals to pursue doctoral degrees are varied and unique.

Some people want to teach. Some want to consult. Some want to solve real-world problems in their practice. Some want to enhance their credibility in order to better influence practice within their field. Some want to shape policy or contribute new knowledge.

Of course, the kind of doctoral degree you ultimately choose to pursue depends on your specific goals and motivations. But it's good to know the full range of possibilities before you pare down your options and select one.

Doctoral degree programs are available from Capella in the following areas of study:

Business – PhD and DBA programs

Counseling – PhD programs

Education – PhD and EdD programs

Health Care Administration – DHA programs

Human Services – PhD and DHS programs

Information Technology – PhD and DIT programs

Nursing – DNP program

Psychology – PhD and PsyD programs

Public Administration – DPA programs

Public Health – DrPH programs

Social Work – DSW program

Did you know?

Capella awarded its first doctoral degree in 1997.



View all programs

View a [full list](#) of Capella doctoral degree programs.

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*How much does a
doctoral degree cost?*



The full cost of getting a doctoral degree at Capella depends on many factors

Among them:



Courseload:

How many courses will you take each quarter?



Residencies:

Does your program have in-person residency requirements? Costs of attendance vary according to program and may include tuition and travel expenses, along with lodging and meals.



Dissertation or doctoral capstone:

The time required to complete this independent research is highly variable.



Transfer credits:

Do you have any that can count toward your program?



Other expenses:

Will you have to pay dependent care while you study? Will you have to invest in a new computer?

Use the Capella [financing resources and tools](#) to help create a strategic plan for financing your degree.

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*Three myths about online vs.
traditional PhD programs*

MYTH 1

Traditional programs offer more interaction with faculty and peers.

Reality: The structure of online programs actually encourages a great deal of interaction. Students often interact with faculty and peers several times a week.

“There may be even more interaction [online] than in a face-to-face program. In a classroom, you may go a whole semester without talking one-on-one with your instructor—not so online, where you will be interacting with your faculty one-on-one multiple times each quarter, typically each week.”

Curtis Brant, PhD, Associate VP of Doctoral Affairs at Capella University

MYTH 2

Online programs aren't rigorous.

Reality: Accreditation helps ensure that online institutions have made excellence in education a priority.

“Within a given program, you learn about and use the same theories and methodologies at both types of institutions. Although online programs can be more convenient for the student, the quality of work, research, and analysis is often comparable to a traditional university.”

Curtis Brant, PhD, Associate VP of Doctoral Affairs at Capella University

MYTH 3

The online dissertation process can't compare with traditional methods.

Reality: In both cases, students identify a research topic, get methodology approval, attend residencies, and write and defend a dissertation. The only difference at Capella is that students attend courses online.

“Most people only go through the doctoral process once, so it's new for everyone. That's why Capella provides resources and advisors from the beginning. The mentor will be there for the dissertation or doctoral capstone, but that won't be the only time a student will have that kind of support.”

Dick Senese, PhD, LP, President at Capella University

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*How to balance
work, family, and
doctoral studies*

Undertaking doctoral study can be an all-consuming process

Capella doctoral advisors and alumni offer valuable suggestions to successfully juggle learning and living.

Set a schedule.

“ You have to be intentional. You’ve got to micro-manage your time and be clear with yourself and others. Getting a doctoral degree is like having a second full-time job—it takes **planning and goal-setting**.

Michael Franklin, PhD Dissertation Advisor at Capella

Take time for yourself.

“ Carve out a specific time to focus on your schoolwork, a time when you are at your most productive. Let your family know that this is your time for work and you don’t wish to be disturbed. **Keep to that time** each day or week so that it’s easy for everyone to remember.

Mark, Capella alumnus*

Establish your priorities.

“ Fit activities into compartments. My priorities were education, family, and work. I alternated studying in the mornings or afternoons every other day. Sundays were reserved for church and family activities. It was amazing how it all fit when I **decided on my priorities**.

Robert, Capella alumnus*

Switch it off.

“ **Establish a curfew** for yourself – a time when you shut down the computer and have a few minutes of family time or quiet time alone. This much-needed break each night is a great stress reliever. Explain to friends and family that there are certain times you will not be responding to emails, texts, and calls. Have a system in place for emergency situations so that you can be reached. For example, if they call 3 times in a row it’s probably urgent.

Mark, Capella alumnus*

Don’t make excuses.

“ I was a single mom in my fifties when I started my doctorate. I had a 13-year-old daughter and I had just adopted a 3-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter. I knew that I had no time to waste, and so I was extremely productive. I was organized, focused, and committed. The word bored was not in my dictionary. And because I was determined to finish my doctorate, I would **not allow any excuse** to stop me.

Franka, Capella alumna*

Consider the fringe benefits.

“ Honor your commitments to your family, your work, and your education. In the end it wasn’t always easy, but it was so worth it! Most important, **I set a great example** for my children. Now they call me Dr. Mom!

Kristin, Capella alumna*

*Actual Capella learner who agreed to appear in Capella promotional materials.

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*Earning a doctorate:
rigorous, not impossible.*



A challenge worth meeting

As you navigate the challenging road to a doctoral degree, we are here to support you on your journey with people and resources that help you move forward.

“ There are definite positives. The process can be a good experience; students will get a lot out of it. **It's challenging but rewarding.**

*Michael Franklin
PhD Dissertation Advisor at Capella*

“ The number one thing I was looking for in a program and university was customer services and attentiveness to me and my needs. **Capella far exceeded those expectations.**

Lynn Desjarlais
Capella University alumnus*

“ Getting a doctoral degree is very much like parenting an infant. **You love it, but it's so hard.** It's the old saying: 'It's the hardest job you'll ever love.'

*Melissa Williams
PhD Dissertation Advisor at Capella*

Connect with a current student or graduate

Find out:

- What it's like to earn a doctoral degree online.
- The quality of the faculty and what kind of support you can expect.
- About Capella's reputation or how employers view an online degree.

Capella has student and graduate ambassadors ready to answer your questions and give you firsthand insight. Connect with an enrollment counselor for more details.

*Actual Capella learner who agreed to appear in Capella promotional materials.

Resources

[Explore Capella doctoral programs](#)

[The Doctoral Journey](#)

[Online learning at Capella](#)

[Take a Capella trial course](#)

[Scholarships for new students](#)

[Learn more about Capella](#)



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1.888.227.9896

[capella.edu](https://www.capella.edu)

ACCREDITATION: Capella University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION: <https://www.hlcommission.org>, 800.621.7440

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