Dissertations Related to Fundraising and Their Implications

for Higher Education Research

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Introduction

In fiscal year 2006, total voluntary support to US higher education reached $28 billion (VSE 2006). Fund raising contributes nearly 10% of higher education expenditures (VSE 2006). With government support as a percentage of institutional budgets decreasing, national trends indicate greater institutional reliance on revenue sources other than tuition and fees (Knapp, 2000). As voluntary support becomes ever more central to the fiscal well- being of colleges and universities, there exists an increased need to understand the fund raising function. With this increased demand, researchers must craft studies which build upon previous higher education fund raising research. However, there has been limited inquiry systematically examining the body of research related to university fund raising (Brittingham and Pezzulo, 1990).

As higher education fund raising also becomes more important and pervasive across college and university campuses, practitioners need additional tools drawn from the knowledge base which informs the practice of generating voluntary support for their institutions. One of the challenges for fund raising as a profession is the lack of a well established knowledge base which informs this practice (Carbone, 1989; Kelly 1991). The primary source of research for the profession are dissertations examining issues of fund raising in higher education. As fund raising moves toward professionalization, understanding how doctoral research helps to inform the knowledge base and how many of these studies make it into the formal published research literature will illuminate the processes by which fund raising, an "emerging profession" moves toward true professionalization (Carbone, 1989).

This paper adds to the literature on college and university fund raising by examining the construction of the fund raising knowledge base through research conducted as a part of doctoral study. Additionally, it adds to the work on fund raising professionalization and professions in general. Specifically, the researchers examine doctoral dissertations focused on higher education fund raising to determine which have made it into the research literature, from which disciplines they emerged, what disciplinary traditions informed the research, whether they were theoretically or practically focused, and which authors became full-time faculty members or professional fund raisers.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

Sociology of the Professions

Sociologists who study the professions suggest that an occupational group's level of professionalization depends upon how many characteristics of a profession these occupations possess (Barber, 1962; Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Greenwood, 1957; Millerson, 1964; Haries-Jenkins, 1970; Moore, 1970).

Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) outlined the historical progression of professions in Great Britain over two centuries. Within their work emerges the notion that a profession is defined by its members having a set of specialized skills, charging set fees, and having a professional association and a code of ethics (Carr Saunders and Wilson, 1933). They also write that "professional associations define and enforce rules of professional conduct" (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933). Since the study by Carr-

Saunders and Wilson (1933), the study of professions has remained an important part of sociological inquiry.

There are certain attributes by which one can determine if an occupation is a profession. Greenwood (1957) describes five attributes which are possessed by an ideal profession. First, it will have a body of systematic theory on which it draws (Greenwood, 1957). This body of knowledge requires an extensive period of training. Second, its professional authority is recognized by the profession's clients (Greenwood, 1957). In the client/professional relationship, the client believes that what the professional judges to be appropriate should not be questioned. Professionals, because of their extensive training (and because the client does not possess that training), are perceived as knowing what is best for the client. Third, the community-at-large agrees that the profession has this authority (Greenwood, 1957). Fourth, a profession will have a code of ethics which is used by members of a profession to self-regulate their behavior. Finally, a profession will have a formal association to which its members belong.

He also suggests that professions should be seen as being distributed along a continuum of professionalism (Greenwood, 1957). Additionally, Greenwood asserts that, "the crucial distinction between professions and nonprofessions is this: the skills that characterize a profession flow from and are supported by a fund of knowledge that has been organized into an internally consistent system called a body of theory" (p.46).

Theories of professions frequently focus on one of two main characteristics; first, is it knowledge-based? And second, does it establish a monopoly in the market for its services? Parsons (1939) claimed that professions serve an altruistic, social function: "a full-fledged profession must have some institutional means of making sure that such

[professional] competence will be put to socially responsible uses" (p. 536). This view was attacked by Johnson (1967) and others who emphasized the power of professions. Instead of altruism, some suggest that professions aim to create "market shelters" (Freidson 1970) and market monopolies (Berlant 1975; Larson 1977). From this point of view, it is important for a profession to seek to license its particular professional practices (Freidson 1975).

In contrast to approaches focusing on professional knowledge or market monopolies, Abbott (1988) claims that the professions have to be seen as a system. The system is centered around work and consists of professions and their links to particular tasks. Abbott calls the link between a profession and its tasks "jurisdiction." The professions compete with one another for control of particular tasks. "In claiming jurisdiction, a profession asks society to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights" (Abbott 1988, p. 59). Knowledge is one means in professional competition; it is the "currency of competition" (Abbott 1988, p. 102).

Goode (1969) suggests that the mastery of a basic body of abstract knowledge and the ideal of service to clients are the two core traits which define professions. Those occupations which posses these two traits may legitimately claim professional status (Goode, 1969).

Fund Raising as a Profession

Within the fundraising community, there has been a drive toward professionalization. Carbone (1989) argues that the issue of whether or not fund raising is a profession is best studied by examining the occupation upon a continuum of

professionalism. By comparing fund raising to other "true-professions," Carbone (1989) concluded that fund raising is *"an emerging profession – an occupation that has moved steadily along the professional continuum; a profession with the potential to attain greater professional stature"* (p.46).

Bloland (2002) concluded that fundraising had reached professional status, but not on the basis of the five criteria of professions. Yet he later argues (Bloland and Temple, 2004) that the professional ideal discussed earlier in this paper, with true professions achieving each of the criteria to some degree is an ideal status which can never be obtained precisely because it is an ideal.

Adding to the published work on fund raising as a profession, Caboni (2001, in press) identified a normative structure of college and university fund raising used by practicing fund raisers as a means of self-regulating the professional behavior of their peers. The existence of a set of professional norms and the adherence to an ideal of service to both an institutional and donor client are two additional markers which suggest fundraising in moving even closer to professionalization (Caboni, 2001).

Fundraising Knowledge Base

One of the primary challenges for fund raising as it progresses toward professional status is the lack of inquiry into the fund raising function within the college and university environment. One of the markers of professionalism is the existence of a knowledge base in which practitioners are well versed. Typically, this knowledge is mastered through an extended period of training. Brint (1994) suggests that technical

knowledge is becoming the most important marker which differentiates professions from occupations.

However, Kelly (1991) comments that, "there are few, if any studies on basic research or theory building" (p. 114) in the literature of the profession. The research which does exist is limited, fragmented, and of marginal quality (Brittingham and Pezzulo, 1990). Fundraisers themselves report that the knowledge they use in doing their duties as development officers is primarily general knowledge which is possessed by anyone (Carbone, 1986). They also believe that such knowledge is best learned on the job rather than in formal education.

Rowland (1983) states that "the systematic study of institutional advancement, employing social science and management-based research methodologies, is of comparatively recent origin" (p. iii). Kelly (1991) notes that of the studies which appear in Rowland's (1983, 1986) work, "there are few, if any studies on basic research or theory building" (p. 114).). Payton (1987) suggests that "a lot of people don't want to be bothered with fund-raising, don't like it, find it distasteful and don't want to be involved with it at all" (p. 133). This may influence faculty willingness to explore fund raising topics as part of a program of studies.

Additionally, the majority of articles focus on the motivators which exist for donors of a particular institution (Burke, 1988). With a vast difference between higher education institutions, a broader inquiry is needed across the spectrum of colleges and universities.

Dissertations and the Knowledge Base

One of the primary sources of research articles focused on fund raising are doctoral theses which authors submit for peer review and publication. The production of research by doctoral students is problematic for the profession for several reasons. First, most doctoral dissertations which take fund raising as their focus are written by practitioners pursuing a terminal degree primarily as a credential to advance their administrative careers (Kelly, 1998). Second, the faculty guiding those dissertations have limited experience with fund raising or related research. As a result, much of the work is repetitive and focused on single institutions and donor characteristics (Kelly, 1998). Finally, Kelly (1998) suggests that much of what is written in theses dissertations never makes it to journal publication because of the limited professional utility for the authors of having a published manuscript.

However, the introduction of a journal focused entirely on institutional advancement and fund raising in higher education in 2000 (*International Journal of Educational Advancement)* and the creation of research awards designed to reward and incentivise outstanding doctoral research on fund raising, raises the question, "What is the current quality, rigor and publication rate of doctoral dissertations focused on fund raising?"

Research Questions

Because one of the main sources for new knowledge is research which occurs in the doctoral training process, the researchers ask the following questions related to fund raising dissertations:

1. What percentage of doctoral dissertations focused on fund raising use national data sets and have results which are generalizable beyond a singe institution?

2. What percentage of dissertations are produced in education departments versus those in other fields?

3. What theoretical frameworks are used to ground the research questions addressed in the study?

4. What percentage are practically oriented versus those focused on building theory?

5. How many (what percentage of) dissertation authors have become full-time faculty members?

6. Of the dissertations, how many have been published in a peer reviewed scholarly journal?

Methodology

Dissertation Abstracts International was searched for key words likely to appear in doctoral dissertations in institutional advancement between 1991 and 2006; results were examined to ensure they were in fact on appropriate topics, producing 246 relevant dissertations. Five dissertations were unobtainable, which left a total of 241 published documents as the basis for this study. The resulting dissertations were read and coded by the researchers. Initially, dissertations were double coded to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Dissertations were coded on multiple dimensions, which included the following:

- department of origin

- theoretical framework (e.g., sociology)

- methodology (quantitative vs. qualitative)

- data source (whether the dataset was from a single or multiple sites, whether the dissertator either studied or worked at that site, and the name of the extant dataset used, if appropriate)

- focus of dissertation (theory-building or practically focused)

- if there was a causal relationship tested, and if so, what the dependent variable(s) were

Additionally, a database of fundraising articles (created by the researchers) was searched to see if the article had also been printed as a book or article(s), whether the dissertator had been or was a practicing fundraiser, and whether the dissertation subsequently worked as a tenure-track faculty member at a research university. The year, advisor, and abstract were culled from the dissertations. The results were tracked and analyzed using Excel.

Results

Of the dissertations examined for this study, only 17 used previously collected datasets (either national or institutional), or 7.1% of the total, and one (0.4%) used both an extant dataset and self-collected data. The remaining 222 (92.1%) used self-collected data and a single dissertation used no collected data.

Data Source
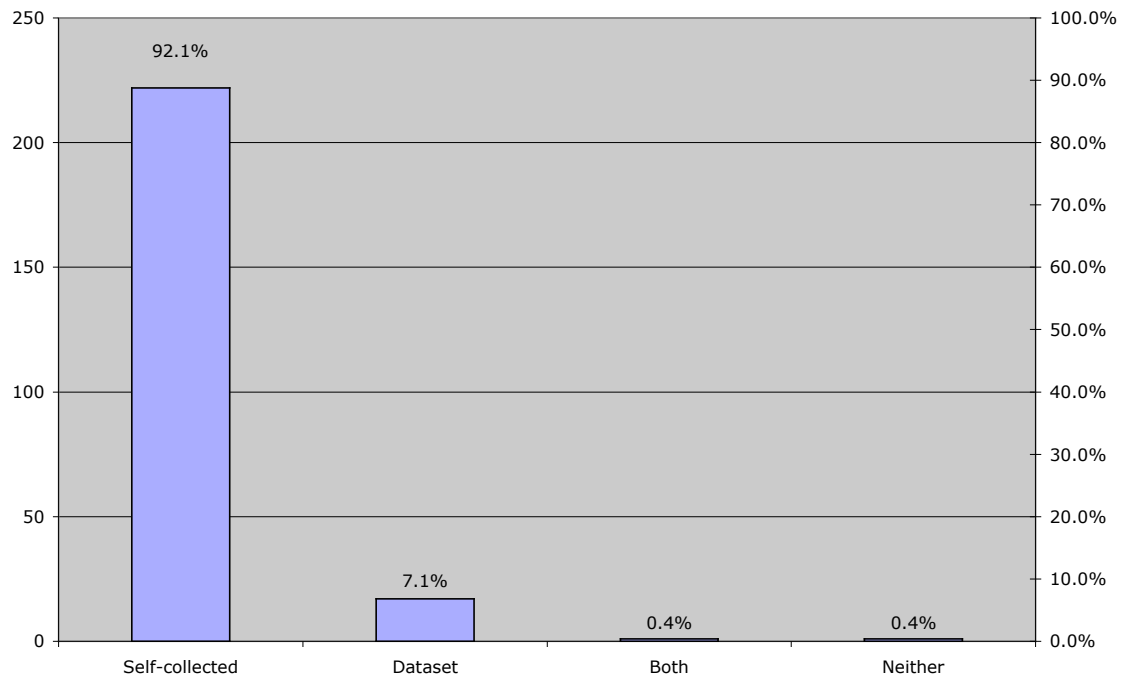
Of the 18 using a dataset, 13 (76.5%) use the Voluntary Support of Education.

Two other dissertations use institutional records as the basis for their analyses. The

remaining two used other national data sources.

Dataset Source
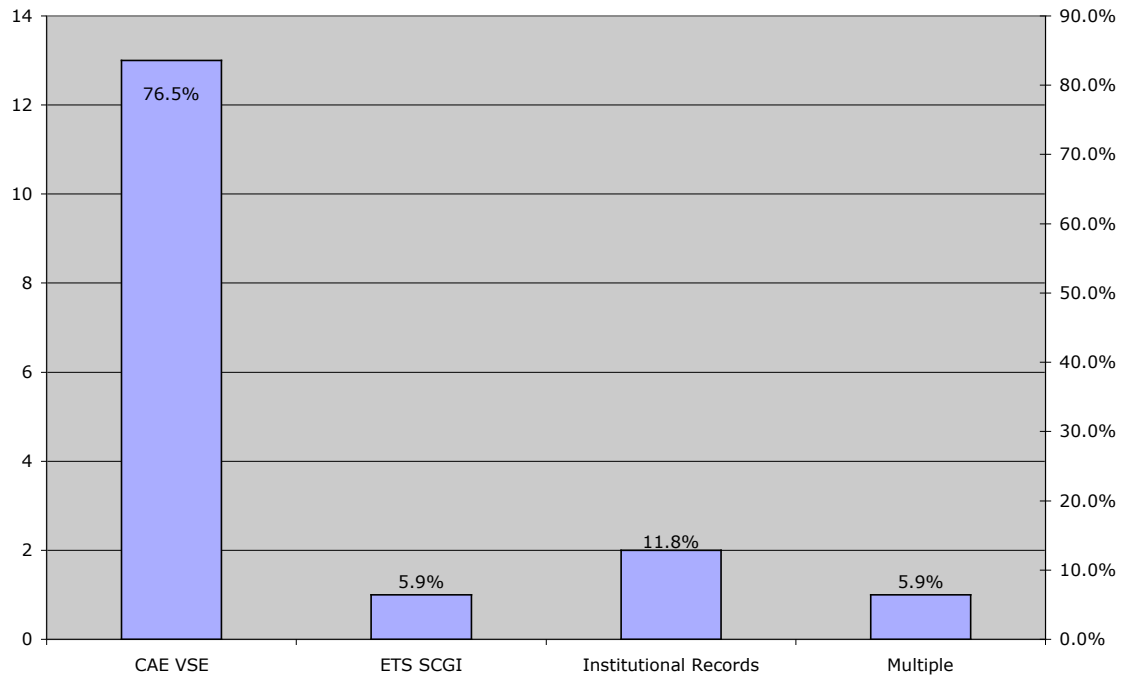
Doctoral candidates research focused on multiple institutions in 148 (61.4%) of the studies, and 54 (22.4%) focused on a single institution other than the researcher's place of employment or doctoral-granting institution.

Number of Institutions
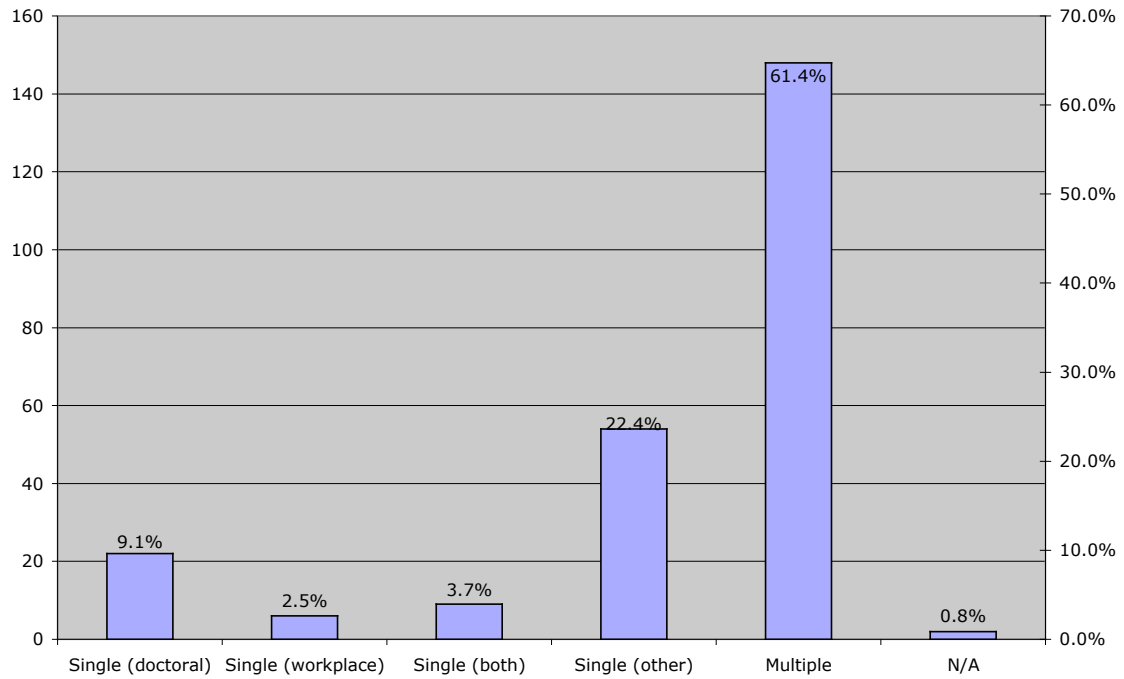
The vast majority (85.1% or 205 documents) of dissertations focusing on fund raising are produced in education-related departments. Most that are not in education are not in disciplines either, but in other fields of study such as business. Only 0.8% of the total were produced in a "true discipline," departments of psychology.

Dissertations by Department
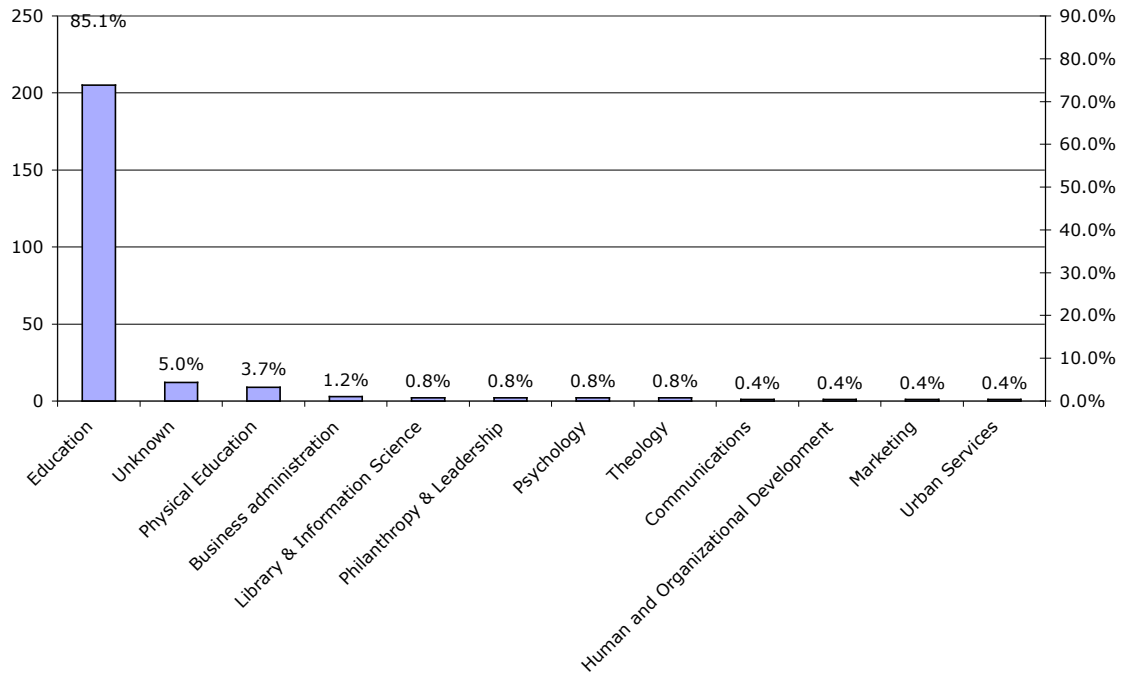
The conceptual frameworks of 194 (80.0%) studies were grounded in theories from a field of study with 47 (20.0%) informed by theories originating in the disciplines. Of the dissertations in the sample, most (65.6%) were limited to an examination of the previous research done on fund raising with the remaining drawing from sociology and organizational theory (9.5), psychology and social psychology (6.2%) student development theory (2.1%), marketing (1.7%), leadership (1.2%), communication (1.2%), history (1.2%) public relations (0.8%), human resources (0.8%) economics (0.8), theology (0.4%) and accounting (0.4%).

Field
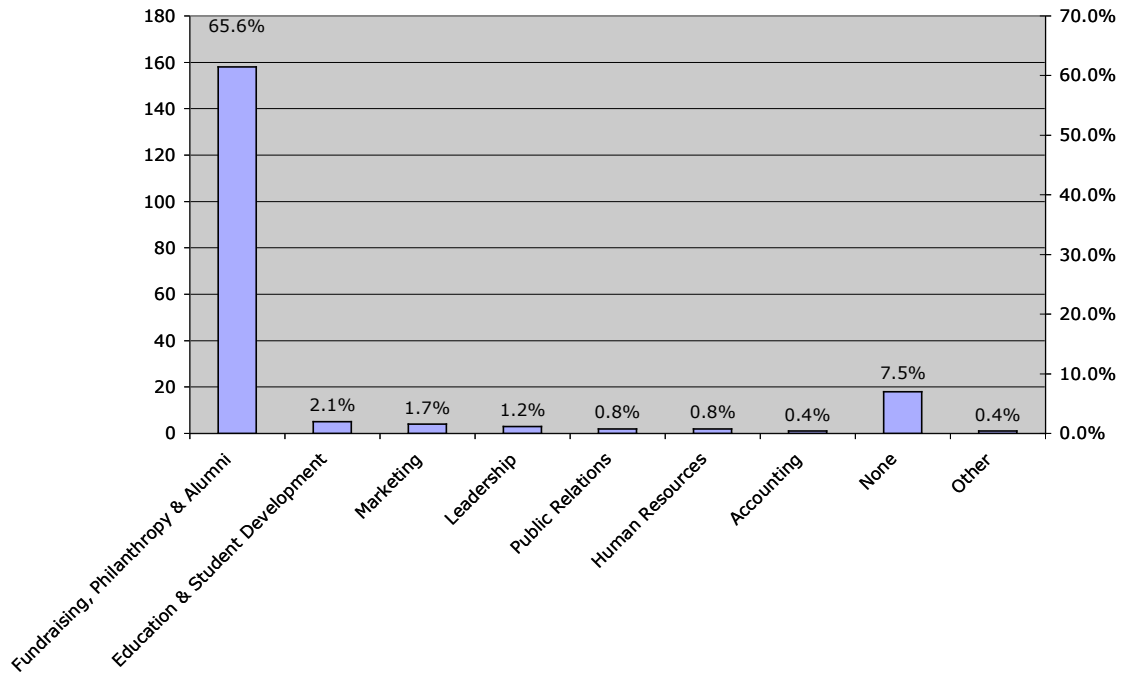
Of the dissertations in the sample 77% (186) were focused on improving practice or providing direction to some institution's fundraising operation. Only 20.0% (48) were theoretically focused with 3.0% (7) doing both. Many dissertations that were practically focused made suggestions for further research, but the research suggested was clearly focused on improving practice.

Purpose
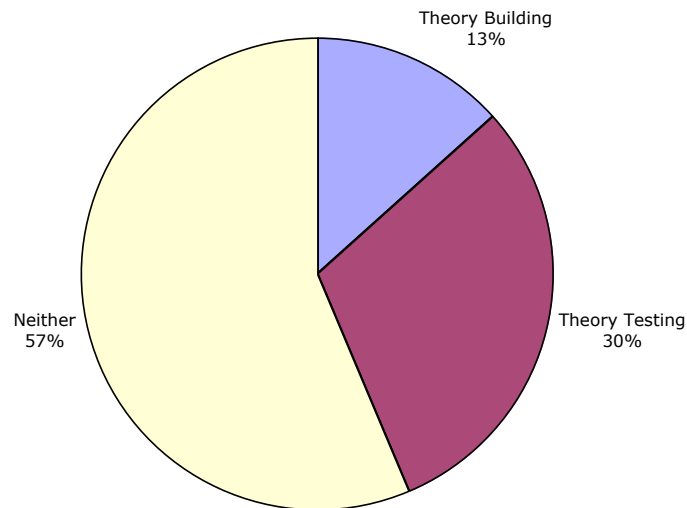
Fifty-five percent of those completing dissertations in the sample received the Ed.D. degree and 45.0% were awarded the Ph.D. However, only nine percent of the dissertation authors have become full-time faculty members at research institutions. Additionally, only 10% were published in a journal. The majority, 19, were published in the *International Journal of Educational Advancement.* Three more appeared in the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, one in the *Journal of Black Studies*, and only one in a general higher education journal, the *Journal of Higher Education.*

Discussion

This study has critical implications for the development of the knowledge-base undergirding university fund raising. In the 27 years since Brittingham and Pezzullo's

call for a more focused research agenda, it appears that little progress has been made to increase the volume or quality of research focused on fundraising. The majority of the dissertations examined were of marginal quality and a scant few made it into the research literature.

Of the 241 dissertations examined, 43 focused on institutional characteristics that led to successful fund raising. These include variables such as institutional age and prestige and more specific research foci such as board, consortium, and foundation characteristics. Another 83 dissertations examined donor characteristics and motivations for giving. This does not include theses that examined "alumni loyalty" abstractly or only non-donative participation; it does include theses that were concerned with donations to a portion of the university, such as to athletics.

Many of these were replications of motivational type studies which appeared in Brittingham and Pezullo's (1990) review of the literature. Kelly (1998) describes these types of studies as "magic button" research – as researchers look for the magical combination of demographic variables which will explain giving for a particular institution. She suggests that there is limited utility to these works and that they frequently are executed in a vacuum, paying little attention to previous studies which might inform the research (Kelly, 1998).

Most dissertation chairs were faculty members who had not studied fund raising themselves, as were committee members. This meant they were unable to guide their dissertators to the work that had been previously been done, which mostly consists of unpublished dissertations. Many dissertations contained words to the effect of, "There has been limited research published about the characteristics of alumni donors in higher

education.," for example, while in fact there was a plethora of literature on the topic. Because the works remained unpublished, they were not readily visible to the next set of researchers.

This issue may be tied to a larger concern about the blurring of purposes between Ed.D. and Ph.D. training. At the national level, there have been calls to reevaluate and redesign the Ed.D. to differentiate it significantly from the Ph.D. The results of this study demonstrate no differences in either conceptual framework or eventual career between those receiving a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. degree. If we are certifying individuals as administrative practitioners, this begs the question, what is the utility of having individuals produce original research which will not extend or revise significantly what we know about fund raising?

Of those dissertations which were published in a research journal, none were included in the three core higher education journals, *Research in Higher Education, The Review of Higher Education* and *The Journal of Higher Education.* This has important implications for the study of higher education. If 10% of university expenditures come from fund raising, the field's understanding of an essential part of the mechanisms of colleges and universities is woefully underdeveloped. For researchers interesting in higher education, this is substantial blind spot in the conceptualization of university functioning and postsecondary education financing.

Perhaps the lack of published inquiry in core journals is tied to faculty reluctance to engage in research addressing issues of fund raising because of the perception that that type of work is unseemly (Payton, 1987). It also may be a function of those receiving doctorates returning to practice instead of pursuing faculty positions. For practicing fund

raisers, there is virtually no incentive to publish original scholarship, and in some cases it may prove detrimental to one's career.

With so few individuals pursuing fund raising research as an extension of their doctoral training joining the professorate, little is done to resolve the issue of faculty with limited understanding of college and university advancement guiding and mentoring the next generation researchers interested in fund raising. This perpetuates the cycle of the unfamiliar mentoring those with interest in the area.

Finally, this study also suggests that the creation of a robust body of knowledge which informs professional practice continues to prove problematic for the fund raising profession as it moves toward professionalization. While other criteria are likely candidates for claiming professional status, the knowledge base is still not sufficiently well developed, nor does the research being conducted systematically address major issues confronting fund raisers and their institutions.

For fund raising to move along the continuum of professions and for the study of higher education to begin to develop a more robust understanding of a critical and underexamined function, this is an issue which must be addressed.

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