"In Great Degree of Spirit"¹: The Beginnings of Higher Education Studies at The University of Toledo

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Abstract

The University of Toledo's Higher Education program and its Russel Center for the Study of Higher Education host the SHHE Journal. This first article provides a historical account of their origins and growth. The beginnings of higher education studies at the University of Toledo marks a significant milestone in the institution's history. Introduced in 1960 at the doctoral level, the Higher Education program was amongst the pioneers of doctoral education at the municipal Toledo University. Its faculty awarded some of the first doctoral degrees at the university and established the first interdisciplinary research center on higher education studies in the state of Ohio. Drawing on archival resources and secondary research, this article examines the broader context of doctoral education in the United States and Ohio, the visionary leadership of the education faculty who championed the cause of graduate education, and the expansion of the program through its own department and research center. Despite many challenges, the Higher Education program and its research center thrived and evolved over the decades. Today, the program boasts more than 650 graduates while its alumni serve institutions of higher education nationwide.

Keywords: higher education program, doctoral degrees, The University of Toledo, state of Ohio, center for the study of higher education

As an academic field of inquiry, the study of higher education spearheaded doctoral education at The University of Toledo. Introduced in 1960, the doctoral program in Higher Education awarded two of the first doctoral degrees ever granted at The University of Toledo (in 1962 and 1964), bestowed the first PhD

¹ The quote comes from Giesecke, 1961.

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degree to an African American at the University of Toledo (1971), and pioneered the first interdisciplinary research-based Center for the Study of Higher Education in the state of Ohio (1967). Introducing doctoral studies at the municipal Toledo University in 1960s was not a small feat. On the one hand, the city of Toledo's focus, and funding capabilities, fell far from graduate studies. On the other hand, only a handful of institutions in Ohio had ventured into doctoral education at the time, while the state itself did not prioritize research and graduate education. However, following the National Defense Education Act of 1958, the federal government was starting to allocate funding to university research and graduate education. This emphasis on graduate training combined with positive changes at Toledo University itself: increased city funding and new leadership. In this context, the initiative to introduce doctoral education arose.

One college pioneered doctoral education at Toledo: the College of Education. In 1960, it offered doctoral degrees in seven areas, including higher education. The Higher Education program thus spearheaded graduate education at the university. Through trial and error, its faculty shaped an innovative curriculum and fought for its approval. Seven years later, in 1967, the faculty further bolstered higher education studies with a unique research center devoted to college and university research. The milestones of the higher education studies program and its faculty have remained under-acknowledged. This article aims to shed light on them. To retrieve the story of the origins and evolution of the Higher Education program at Toledo University, I explored the rich archival resources of The University of Toledo's Canaday Center, the university historical accounts, and secondary research on doctoral studies in the state of Ohio and the country.

Doctoral Education in the United States and the State of Ohio

The Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957 turned all attention to university research and doctoral education (Geiger, 2019; Thelin, 2019). In 1958, the U.S. government passed the National Defense Education Act, which allocated unprecedented amounts of funding for scientific research and doctoral training. Federal support for American universities to graduate students with PhDs in a variety of disciplines – the future professors across diverse institutions of higher learning – represented the most "remarkable shifts of the 60's," and yielded a fast rate of "doctoral production" by all types of universities (Baker, 2020; Kidd, 1972, pp. 64-65).

In Ohio, only four institutions offered doctoral degrees prior to 1960: the Ohio State University, the University of Cincinnati, Western Reserve University, and the Case Institute of Technology; three quarters of the awarded doctoral degrees came from the Ohio State (OBOR, 1966). In the late 1950s-early 1960s, state officials gradually developed and implemented strategies to increase research and development capacities in higher education, especially at public institutions. Two influential reports swayed state legislators in that decision: the one from the state-funded Industrial Development Committee, and the other from the U.S. Department of Defense; both reports pointed to Ohio's limited research and development capabilities that resulted in gradual loss of military contracts and in the state's "astonishingly low" commitment to research universities" (Baker, 2020; Ohio General Assembly, 1962, p. 25). As the runnerup for state governor in 1962, James Rhodes asserted that "We have only just crossed the threshold of the golden age of science," and "we need brainpower to continue these magnificent advances" (Rhodes, 1962). One of Governor Rhodes' first moves after winning the gubernatorial elections was to create the Ohio Board of Regents (OBOR). In 1963, OBOR emerged as the state's higher education planning and coordinating board, whose main functions included the oversight of the growth of higher education especially at the doctoral level (OBOR, 1966). In fact, it was the "interest on the part of the state and municipal universities in graduate work [that] prompted the establishment of OBOR" (OBOR, 1966, p. 95).

The Initiative to Introduce Doctoral Education at the Municipal Toledo University

At the end of the 1950s, and in the midst of growing national and state support for research and graduate training, the municipal Toledo University found itself on the brink of change. A new President, William Carlson, took the university reigns in September of 1958 ("His period of service longest," 1972). A new Dean of the College of Education, George Dickson, had stepped into the position in the fall of 1957 (University of Toledo, n.d.). And in October of 1959, the residents of the City of Toledo amended the university's charter to increase its income by \$800,000, up to an estimated \$1.729 million (Floyd, 2022, p. 137; Office of the President, 1960). These factors and individuals combined behind the initiative to extend Toledo University's education to the graduate level. For a municipal institution of average size in the Northwest corner of Ohio, introducing doctoral training would require very different resources, commitments, and energy than the ones utilized up to that point.

It was the College of Education, the largest Toledo University college at the time, that spearheaded the introduction of doctoral studies in 1959 (Office of the President, 1959). At their own initiative, Dean George Dickson and his faculty team of the College of Education Committee on Graduate Study, Robert Gibson, Anthony Deiulio, and K.C. DeGood, forwarded ideas on the introduction of doctoral degrees to President Carlson, who then promptly followed up with a letter to the Commission on Colleges and Universities of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCACSS) - one of the six regional accreditors of higher education institutions and the predecessor of the Higher Learning Commission. The letter notified the commission that the College of Education intended to extend its graduate program to the doctoral level.

Perhaps not surprising, that letter was not met with enthusiasm. A quick retort followed. On July 7, 1959, the Commission's Assistant Secretary John Forbes responded to President Carlson's letter: "We must pass on to you the sad news," he wrote, "that our Executive Board, at its June meeting, voted to discourage your institution from engaging in doctoral work until further study of that problem had been effected..." (NCACSS, 1959).

Undeterred, in December of 1959, Toledo University's faculty and Board of Directors formally approved the proposal to offer doctoral degrees in education (Office of the President, 1959; COE, 1959). The proposal included "Higher and Teacher Education" as one of the major areas of study. The local newspaper, the Toledo Blade, got wind of the proposal and in a December 27 editorial blasted the idea as overly ambitious. "To begin acquiring [doctoral program] now with limited means," wrote the Blade editor, "is to court the likelihood of diluting the quality of undergraduate offerings that are the foundation of a municipal university. It is a risk that TU – and the Toledo area young people to whom it was dedicated – can ill afford" (p. 6).

Disturbed by the article, two days later, Dean Dickson and the faculty swiftly defended the decision. On December 29, they published a response asserting that "we are not attempting to develop research professors; rather, we are trying to prepare college teachers and professionally trained personnel for public schools systems" (COE, 1959a). Indeed, continued their reply, the need for higher education professionals and administrators across public school systems in Northwest Ohio and the broader region was urgent. Growing student enrollments and flourishing colleges and universities necessitated fast increase in training for teachers, administrators, and educational professionals. The Teacher Placement Bureau of the College, the Dean and faculty argued, "received requests for 300 persons to serve on college faculties across the nation" (COE, 1959a). Increasingly, such positions either required a doctorate or listed the doctorate as being highly advantageous. For the 400,000 young Toledoans, the response ended, Toledo University presented the only opportunity for advanced degrees (Office of the President, 1959; COE, 1959a).

The Launch of Doctoral Studies at Toledo University

And it was so that without the approval of the university accreditor or the endorsement of the local media, doctoral classes in education started on February 1 of 1960 (Hickerson, 1972, p. 320). Two weeks before the first doctoral student arrived in the College of Education, Assistant Secretary John Forbes from the accrediting commission sent another letter to President Carlson searching for a solution to the university's "launching an upward extension of programs on February 1 without proper authorization from the Commission" (NCACSS, 1960). He proposed that a commission representative officially visit the university soon, and in case the visit went well, report back to the commission in June. "We will welcome the visit," responded President Carlson a week later (Office of the President, 1960), but "we also insist that we are ready and strongly motivated to offer doctoral studies." "In the last decade," wrote the President,

the College of Education has experienced a rapidly increasing demand and enrollment at the graduate level... from 93 in 1953 to 265 in 1959 ... even greater increase in summer 186 in 1954 and 417 last summer... Over 180 inquiries from well qualified persons had been received by the end of 1957, which prompted the College to begin self-study leading to the establishment of doctoral degrees. Financially, the University is in the best condition it has been for years... (Office of the President, 1960)

Although undeterred to offer doctoral degrees, President Carlson and Dean Dickson still heeded the warnings of the Blade editor and the accrediting commission. For them, "a consultant" from an established research university with national standing could be employed to provide an official stamp of the doctoral initiative (Office of the President, 1962). A candidate emerged in the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies of the University of Chicago: Dean Giesecke. He officially accepted the invitation to consult on doctoral education in April of 1960 (Office of the President, 1960a). In addition, President Carlson brought prominent speakers on doctoral education to visit campus and present their findings: Earl J. McGrath, Executive Officer of the Institute of Higher Education, Teachers College, Columbia, former U.S. commissioner of education, and author of the popular article "The Doctoral School and the Decline of Liberal Education"; and Jacquies Barzun, the graduate dean of Columbia University who wrote scathing articles about the status of graduate education in the country (Office of the President, 1960b).

The approval and accreditation of doctoral programs in the College of Education took four years. All the while, the college "drove doctoral programs in the dark" (COE, 1961a; Giesecke, 1961a). Institutional support was weak as the Graduate School, created in 1963, and the Graduate Council (the official houses of doctoral programs) were in their infancy (Graduate School Catalog, 1967-1968). And no other college would yet venture into doctoral training; it was not until 1965 when the first Arts and Sciences doctoral programs enrolled their first five students (The University of Toledo, 1975). Criticism was also abundant. Above all, as consultant Giesecke's warned, were the "not too clearly perceived" distinctions between the PhD and EdD degrees (Giesecke, 1961). "In my judgement," Giesecke elaborated,

the Education faculty is much more nearly ready to direct acceptable work leading to a professional doctorate (the Ed.D.) than it is to direct work to prepare research scholars (the Ph.D.).... Professional training is one thing, but scholarship consists in great degree of spirit; it is almost a way of life that it takes time to create and absorb; it is learned more from example than precept.

From his perspective, the TU faculty had limited experience in directing doctoral research, and there was a need to invite "distinguished professors at other institutions to help you evaluate some of the first dissertations and dissertation examinations." Especially confusing for him was the degree on College Teaching, as, according to consultant Giesecke, "new programs in education should come from established institutions such as Chicago, Harvard, Stanford who have the prestige to do so, and ... not from smaller universities" (Giesecke, 1961).

Despite the criticisms and challenges, however, enrollments steadily increased (COE, 1961a; Giesecke, 1961a). In 1962, an accreditation visit report acknowledged the viability of the educational doctoral programs (NCACSS,



Note: The building housed the College of Education and the Higher Education Program in 1964 (SCHE, 1971).

1962). In 1964, the enlarged college moved to the newly constructed Snyder Memorial building (CSHE, 1971). By 1968, the college featured "the advanced" doctoral most programs at the university, offered in six areas: counseling, educational administration, curriculum and teaching, physical education, foundations of education, and higher education; all of these had "been granted preliminary accreditation by North Central Association" the (University Relations, 1968a). А decade later, by 1970-1971, the College of Education included 162 doctoral students (from amongst the 310 total

for the university) and had conferred more than 106 doctorates (Graduate School, 1971).

The Higher Education Doctoral Program

Thus, in 1960, higher education studies pioneered Toledo University's doctoral training. Two of the first doctoral degrees, granted between 1962 and 1964, were in higher education studies; the recipients: Richard Perry and Beverly Robinson (University of Toledo Libraries Catalog). In addition, the first African-American to receive a PhD degree from the university, Samuel Creighton in 1971, came from the higher education studies program as well ("Biggest graduating class," 1971).

As a specialized field of study that leads to a graduate degree in college/university administration and teaching, higher education has a long history. Not much is known, however, of the programmatic origins of the field (Goodchild, 1996). Similar to most professional fields, for a long time, college administrators and faculty learned their craft on their own, through trial and error (Wright, 2007). Organized courses in college and university issues in the United States and Europe first appeared in 1893, offered by Granville Stanley Hall, the President of Clark University in Wooster, MA (Goodchild, 1996; Koelsch, 1987). Founder of the first all-graduate university in the country, G. Stanley Hall advocated for university reform and created the study of "higher pedagogy" to train a new generation of university administrators and faculty who would transform American universities (Goodchild, p. 1). In the 1920s, his programmatic ideas were embraced by six other universities starting with the Ohio State University in 1918, Teachers College, Columbia (1920), the University of Chicago (1921), the University of Pittsburg (1928), the University of California Berkeley (1929), and the University of Michigan (1929) (Goodchild, 1996, p. 16).

At Toledo University, in February of 1960, students enrolled for the first time in both PhD and EdD degrees in Educational Administration, Higher and Teacher Education, and College Teaching. Four of the 39 tenure-track faculty in the College of Education taught higher education-focused courses: three professors - George Edmond Dickson, Dean of COE; K.C. DeGood (Administration and Supervision); and Frank R. Hickerson (Administration and Supervision) – and one associate professor: David S. Rosenburg (Administration and Supervision). One year after the start of doctoral studies, there were 12 doctoral candidates in the Higher Education major area – the third most popular area, after Administration (18 candidates) and Guidance (also with 18 candidates). In addition, 17 of the 54 doctoral students altogether (across 7 areas + 1 as not declared) had declared higher education as a minor area (the most of all other minor declarations). Of the 54, 12 of the candidates worked or had worked as college teachers. Their geographic distribution was: Ohio - 47; Michigan - 4; West Virginia - 2; and Foreign - 1 (COE, 1961).

Expansion and Growth in Higher Education Studies

Although studies in higher education had a large appeal and student enrollment, until 1967, faculty were housed in different college departments. That year, however, the college created a special Department of Higher Education. In addition, a brand-new research center for the study of higher education accompanied the new department. The news on the new department and the research center reached the Blade, which mistakenly reported that the College of Education planned to discontinue its existing departments, and that other colleges might lose their own graduate training programs as a result of the announced changes ("Office of higher education," 1967). Stirred by several incorrect statements in the article, Dean Dickson responded with corrections on December 13, 1967 (COE, 1967). In his response, he calmly assured the public that neither department closures nor plans to overtake other colleges' graduate training were involved. "Two units were created," he noted, "a department of higher education and a Center for the Study of Higher Education as a parallel development to the department" (COE, 1967). This center, he continued, would allow interdisciplinary collaboration amongst faculty in other disciplines and those in higher education "with no need for joint appointments, split budgeting between colleges, or other unnecessary confusion... The Center is not a threat to the regular activities of faculty in other disciplines" (COE, 1967; Hull, 1972).

Both the new department and the novel center signaled growth and expansion of the higher education studies. One major development that contributed to this expansion related to Toledo University's change of status from a municipal university to a state supported one. The university's decision to join the state system of higher education was necessitated by the institution's growing financial uncertainties. Lack of reliable municipal funding had threatened the university efforts to grow as well as expand graduate studies. By the mid-1960s, the state's commitment to public higher education and graduate training was at all times high. According to the OBOR's Master Plan, "A major objective in state higher education policy should be to strengthen and expand resources for graduate study at the doctoral level degree" (OBOR, 1966, p. 9). By 1967, Ohio's General Assembly had approved an additional 19 PhD programs at six public institutions on top of the ones approved in 1963 (Baker, 2020).

As a municipal institution, Toledo University was entitled to some, albeit limited, funding from the state of Ohio, but the state policy of financing municipal universities was constantly subject to opposition from the state universities, especially the Ohio State (Floyd, 2022, pp. 146-147). Indeed, in a letter from November 18, 1965, the Toledo University Provost shared his fears that "OSU will scoop all support from the state." Dean Dickson's worries (COE, 1965) echoed the Provost's, sharing his apprehension that "The Ohio State University... consistently uses every manipulation possible to secure budgetary dominance among higher education institutions in this state... which will continue to insure such budgetary dominance" (COE, 1965, p. 1). Dean Dickinson was also acutely aware that "Graduate development definitely appears to be the sine qua non of future higher institutional greatness in Ohio and elsewhere," and "The future of the University of Toledo at the graduate level is being determined as much by our actions or lack of them as it is being determined by factors outside of this institution" (COE, 1965, p. 2).

Toledo University's financial uncertainties and the enormous struggle of the institution to secure limited funding from the state pushed the university towards rescinding its municipal status and applying to become a statesupported institution (University of Toledo Board of Directors Minutes, 1965). For the university leaders, that change would reflect the institution's expanding services to the whole state, well beyond the municipal boundaries. It would also offer "some assurance of income expected to expand with enrollment growth and with the growth of graduate programs. Municipal tax support provided by a general property tax levy was unable to afford any such promise." On July 1, 1967, the university officially became a state-supported university and its assets were assumed by the state of Ohio (Floyd, 2022).

The New Department and the Center for the Study of Higher Education

The confluence of favorable developments thus led to the creation of the Department of Higher Education and the Center for the Study of Higher Education in 1967. Five faculty were the core of both: Richard H. Davis, the first acting chairman of the department, Richard R. Perry, John H. Russel, Richard White, and Dean George E. Dickson (COE, 1967). The department offered only doctoral courses; no master's level courses were available (COE, 1967). The department worked in a symbiotic relationship with the university leadership and administration. In reality, nationwide, it was typical for the faculty in higher education programs to come largely from administrative ranks who often did not possess advanced degrees in the field of higher education. It would not be until the end of the 1970s that degrees in higher education for faculty tenure appointments emerged as a requirement. All higher education faculty at the University of Toledo were active administrators. In fact, staying a full-time faculty in the department was not an option in those early years. John Russel taught only for a year before becoming also the assistant to the University Provost, and then assistant to President Carlson responsible for accreditation ("Dr. Russel named," 1966; Public Information Office; 1977; The University of Toledo, 1968; University Relations, 1966). And Robert Sandin, who joined the university in 1968 as professor of higher education and took over the direction of the research center, was quickly appointed VP for Academic Affairs the following year (University Relations, 1969b).

The faculty's administrative responsibilities and engagement benefited the Higher Education department. The close relationship with the senior decision-makers allowed the department to run a special innovative and competitive program for interns, fully funded by the University General Fund from its start in 1967 (University Relations, 1967, 1968, 1969). Doctoral interns were selected as full-time doctoral students for three years. The selection committee included the COE Dean and Associate Dean, the Provost, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Director of Institutional Research, and faculty. Interns received a waiver of instructional fees (for 60 credit hours beyond a master's degree), a stipend of \$3600 for the 1st year, \$4000 for the second, and \$5000 for the third and final year (University Relations, 1967, 1968, 1969). And each was assigned to a different administrative university unit every year while also taking

courses. Four interns joined in 1967, six in 1968, another six in 1969, and four in 1870. Commenting on the internship program's "remarkably successful track record," in 1970 John Russel summarized: "The program has attracted doctoral degree candidates to the University of Toledo from 14 colleges and universities in nine states and Canada," given them "a chance to be immediately and directly involved in University operations, and it has provided a point of entry into university administration for minority group members who are urgently needed in this field" (University Relations, 1970).

The Center for the Study of Higher Education itself embraced a bold agenda from the start. His founder and first chair, John Russel, joined the faculty in September of 1965. With degrees from Harvard University and the University of Chicago, experiences as a U.S. Department of Education officer, a dean and acting president of Shimer College, IL, and an associate professor at the University of Denver, he brought much expertise and initiative to the program ("Dr. Russel named," 1966; Public Information Office; 1977). Russel taught in the PhD program in Higher Education for four years, while also serving as the Provost's

Figure 2 John Russel and Higher Education Students



Note: John Russel is standing, third from the left (CSHE, 1961).

assistant; then worked for 2 years as assistant to President Carlson; and then in 1971 became Department Chair of the Department of Higher Education.

The research center conducted studies on higher education, specifically focusing on the development of liberal arts colleges in Northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan; provided guidance to the efforts of regional colleges to enhance instructional resources and their capacity for conducting institutional research; secured grants, including federal grants under the Developing Institutions Title of HED Act of 1965; and hosted prominent speakers ("Administers grant on study," 1972; CSHE, 1972a; CSHE, 1975; Hull, 1972;

University Relations, 1969a). The first of its speakers was the Chancellor of OBOR, John Millett. The center published Critique, a quarterly memorandum featuring manuscripts on practical issues of higher education, and a monograph series (CSHE, 1972, 1972a; CSHE, 1975; "Seven liberal arts," 1974). Both were distributed amongst 600 presidents, deans, trustees, and other college and university professionals around the country (CSHE, 1972a; Hull, 1972; Source: Dr. John Reid, the 1978 Director of the Center).

In the summer of 1972, the center moved to "tight but workable facilities on the third floor of Libbey Hall," and in 1974, it aligned itself better with the Department of Higher Education (CSHE, 1975; Hull, 1972a), expanding its mission to include more in-house team research as well as contribute to doctoral training. When in 1977 John Russel retired, students and alumni lobbied to name the center after him (The University of Toledo, 1977 and 1977a;

Figure 3

The Russel Center for the Study of Higher Education, 2023



Note: Photograph taken by The University of Toledo marketing department.

"Department and Center news," 1977). The John Russel Center continued to function as a research hub for the Higher Education Department and to publish a Center Newsletter three times a year (John Russel Center, 1979). Upon John Russel's death in 1991, the Russel family established a scholarship fund in his name to support graduate students and higher education research initiatives linked to the Russel Center (The University of Toledo, 1991).

The Legacy of the University of Toledo's Higher Education Program

Successes and challenges accompanied the higher education studies program in the next several decades. A master's degree soon became part of the program's offering. In the mid-1990s, the doctoral program faced an existential threat and fought to justify its existence with the overwhelming support of its surrounding community, students, and alumni (Katsinas, 2007). In the period 1994-2000, the program saw its largest increase in doctoral enrollment of any doctoral program at the university, and pioneered an innovative program - the Community College Fellowship. Designed to mimic the internship program from prior years, the fellowship was officially launched in 1997 and, for several years, served as a bridge between the university and the surrounding community colleges (Personal discussion with Dr. Ron Opp, March 16, 2023). Growth continued in the mid-2000s as the program adjusted to the demands of the 21st century and the rising competition. Today, the program boasts more than 650 graduates, of whom more than 250 doctorates, and its alumni serve institutions of higher education in leadership positions across the state of Ohio and the country.

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