I have convened two task forces to examine our doctoral programming in light of a number of concerns, outlined below, about our current offerings. This was prompted in part by the rapid movement of top education schools to implement new EdD programs that are quite different from the directions we have taken to date. It also was prompted in part by my realization that PhD training here, while strong in a few areas, included a large number of cases of part-time students who received very little of the intense and continuing immersion in strong research that characterizes the best programs elsewhere. We had examples of the best approaches among us, and I thought that our growing national status required us to learn how to make all of our PhD training as strong as the best arrangements we now have. Some additional concerns are laid out below. Some of the members of these two task forces looking at the PhD and the EdD in the School of Education have asked me to provide some overview information about the reasons for undertaking a review of existing programs and most likely making efforts to improve them. This is my response to that request.

Concerns
First, let me state some concerns about where we are today. We have some very good programs that have a history of preparing people who go on to great careers. We have a faculty that in most cases works extremely hard to provide strong support to every doctoral student. Nonetheless, there are some matters worth considering, I believe. This especially is the case because of the overall rise of the University as a very top tier research institution.

1. For historical reasons, we have not clearly defined the roles for our PhD and EdD. So, for example, we offer only the EdD in mathematics education while we offer a PhD as well in social studies education, even though we have more faculty in the former, some of whom have particularly world-class reputations. There is at least some evidence that decisions were made at a particular point in time that amounted to deciding that certain areas were not strong enough to have a PhD but could offer an EdD that was thought of, at least a while ago, as “PhD lite.”

2. The very best schools of education in the country, indeed the very best universities altogether, have PhD programs that are deep apprenticeships in independent research. They have very few students per faculty member. They are full-time residential programs so that students can be immersed in the ongoing research led by faculty. Graduate faculty are expected to seek external funding and to use it to support these full-time students. Even though they receive only academic year salaries, graduate faculty in other institutions routinely provide strong advising to their doctoral students during the summer, both in other schools of education and in other parts of the University of Pittsburgh. Because of the
continuity and intensity of arrangements for PhD training, students finish in a relatively few years. We have too many part-time PhD students, they take a long time to finish, and mostly they get remarkably little continual deep immersion in research.

3. We have a strong market, and we need the tuition, for terminal professional degrees. However, so long as these degrees require a published dissertation, they place a huge load on faculty, since each faculty member in some of our professional programs has dozens of advisees, few of whom can proceed through writing a document that will be publicly available on the Internet without a lot of individual coaching and attention.

4. Because of our highly siloed doctoral programming, with dozens of different “programs,” each of which operates quite independently, it is not uncommon for a student to go through doctoral training that gains very little oversight from more than one to three faculty. In one or two extreme cases, because of travel or other leaves, there may have been no graduate faculty member supervising a doctoral student for a semester or even longer. Even when general requirements have been set for a degree, it is not uncommon that one faculty member, unaudited, will substitute some other course for a required course in a student’s plan of studies. Clearly, there is need for arrangements that make doctoral training the shared responsibility of the entire graduate faculty, that assure that every student completes required coursework, and that keep all aspects of doctoral training for every student public, transparent, and auditable. Quite likely, there also is need to assure that there is a common core of preparation that distinguishes people with doctorates from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

5. The top schools of education, working with the CPED initiative sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, have made great progress in redesigning EdD programs to represent the terminal professional (as opposed to research) degree in education. These top tier programs generally focus on developing the knowledge and skills needed to hold leadership roles in education. The capstone projects of these programs often are not dissertations but rather problem solving activities in education that are substantial, result in institutional improvement or better instruction, and are documented in ways that do not necessarily caricature the dissertation.

6. Because the EdD is classified by the University as a research doctorate (this was done because our School of Education forebears insisted on it), only faculty with significant publication records can advise students or serve on their committees. The fine people we have hired as “practice professors” because of their professional mastery often cannot gain graduate faculty status. In essence, the ones who could do the most to produce top professionals because they have been top professionals are barred from filling that role, at least officially. We could get this changed if that was our pleasure as a faculty.

7. While the PhD should be a full-time resident program, the EdD, being for professionals ready to advance to the top of their profession, must necessarily be structured to be accessible to those who work all day. Currently, we barely do this, with classes that start earlier than work days in education end and minimal summer offerings in many program
areas. We might better accommodate EdD students with online and executive format courses, a significant number of which might be offered during the summer.

8. We currently have a remarkable proportion of total teaching load of tenure line faculty being put into very small sections of courses for PhD students. While every such specialized course is justified in principle, the plain truth is that no school, including ours, can afford to have so much of its faculty teaching time invested in such small courses. The best way to improve this situation may be to do the following:

   a. Make our programs cohort programs, with all courses being offered on a two-year cycle. There may be one or two courses that have to be offered each year, but many are not highly sequenced.

   b. Think hard about what every student should have and also about the extent to which different students require different versions of courses that have substantial overlap.

**Suggestions**

While it is up to each working group to think through the best ways to address these concerns, a few possibilities might merit special attention. These are not the only possible solutions, but rather possibilities against which other alternatives might be measured.

1. As noted above, it is worth considering whether at least our EdD programming should be by cohorts.

2. Some solutions to issues in our EdD programming may involve limiting admissions to numbers faculty can handle. In such cases, we will need to explore whether expanding associated MEd offerings can make up the lost revenue. On the other hand, group advising and other solutions might decrease the faculty work load for EdD’s and permit us to recruit aggressively.

3. Clearly, we will benefit from some standardization of certain kinds of courses across areas for the PhD. A School-wide degree may be difficult, but two or three clusters and more focus on research experiences rather than a multitude of low-enrollment courses might also be considered. And, there may well be a small number of signature courses that we want all or almost all of our PhD students to have.

4. It is worth considering whether we can consolidate our methods course offerings into a small number of alternatives. A primary reason we have so many right now is the low mathematical sophistication of the PhD students in some areas. This problem can be addressed both of the following ways:

   a. Teamwork to develop approaches to teaching about methods that are easier for students with less mathematics to follow.

   b. Setting quantitative preparation as a requirement for the PhD program. With small numbers of full-time students, we can be choosier. However, we should still be
working hard to eliminate mathematical language that isn’t necessary. For example, I could teach about the central limit theorem and the meaning of the normal curve using a lot of equations. Only the folks with a lot of math would follow me, and they still might not understand the implications of the reasoning. Or, I could present the same idea conceptually without writing any equations, and it might get across better even to the more mathematically minded students. If our research methodology faculty are creative and work with key faculty from other areas, we can address this problem and decrease the need for different sequences of courses in each subarea of the school.

5. There is no hidden agenda in this process related to the administrative organization of the School. At the same time, the committees may identify teams of people that need to work together to make certain parts of the doctoral programs work better. That need should be stated clearly, but the work teams need not address whether any change in reporting structures is needed.

6. It is difficult to imagine doing any better in recruiting or even maintaining our current position in the realm of terminal professional degrees without substantial changes in how we offer courses. A few years ago, moving classes to a later hour might have been sufficient. Today, online and blended courses with high technology value added, executive formatting, and expanded summer offerings are also probably necessary to the survival of anything close to our current budget. The work teams might consider specifying what they see as ideal approaches to offering the courses, projects, apprenticeships, and advising that they recommend for our doctoral programs.

I am impressed with the energy and wisdom that has been brought to the design task by the two task forces. Their work is providing a clear path to doctoral programs that merit not only the ranking we have attained but also the status to which the University and its Schools aspire. I’m sure that as the proposals of the task forces are presented to the entire faculty for review, additional good ideas will emerge. This entire process so far has reinforced my belief that as a faculty, we are ready to take our place in the very top tier of schools of education.