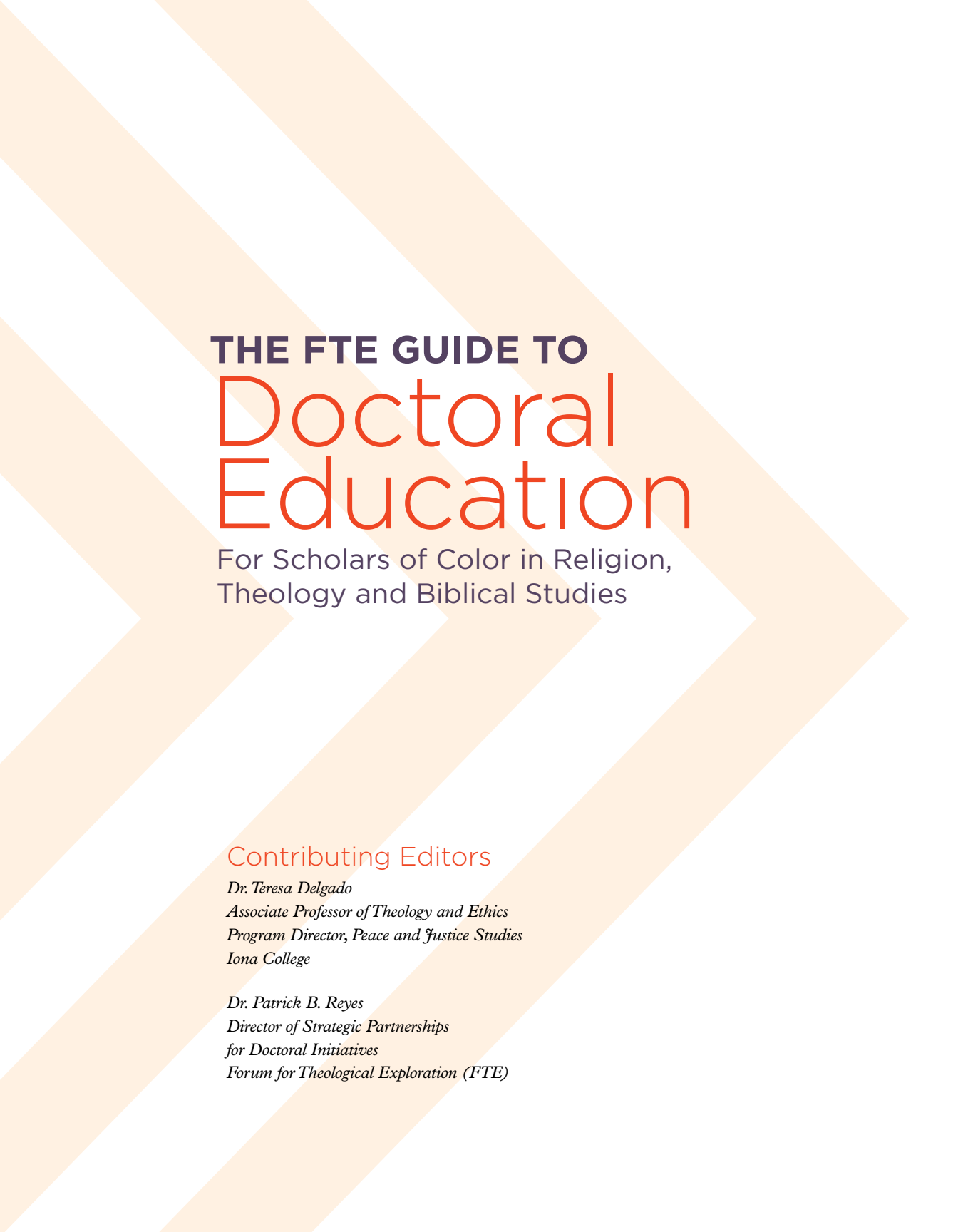




Forum *for*
Theological
Exploration

THE FTE GUIDE TO Doctoral Education

For Scholars of Color in Religion,
Theology and Biblical Studies



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Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE)

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The First Step is the Hardest

By Oluwatomisin Oredein, FTE Fellow '14, '16

*how courageous
foolish
wayward
startling
to waltz into the
lion's den
give its snout a kiss.*

*how vast
stunning
unheard of
to bear your weight in royalty
in front of kings
claiming importance.*

*how stubborn
and strong
to merge catastrophic beauty
with the risky unknown business of
imagining yourself worthy.*

*kiss lions
burden kings
beget beauty
excite your will.
be tame and wild
all at the same time.*

*clothe your feet
in moccasins of wonder.*

then, walk.



preface



Unanswered questions. A passion for scholarship and deep thought. Love for the critical exchange of ideas. Inspired or called by a mentor or a community. Wanting to make a difference and contribution to the academy that honors our ancestors and communities of accountability. Asking and answering perennial and innovative theological questions.

For these reasons and so many more, you are beginning the long process of discerning your life’s calling and vocation as a scholar.

There are many questions about doctoral education that go unanswered—and sometimes unasked—when people begin to consider pursuing a doctorate. Questions such as, *What programs or field should I explore? How will I fund my studies? How long will the program take? What are my job prospects after completing*

the doctorate? With whom should I study, and at what institution?

These are just the more obvious questions. There are many other unspoken, unwritten rules and considerations that aspiring doctoral students rarely know about.

This guide provides insights from those who have pursued the doctorate, obtained degrees and now mentor the next generation of scholars in religion, biblical studies, and theology. Here we pull back the veil of the doctoral degree process, making plain the essential considerations about doctoral programs in theological education.

Our guiding purpose for writing the guide is to help you discern your next most faithful step.

Since 1968, FTE has been supporting doctoral students of color. This guide is another expression of support from our partners and cloud of witnesses to provide the next generation of scholars with the information, data, questions, and resources they need.

It is our sincerest hope that the guide provides clarity—not about whether pursuing a doctorate is a good thing, but rather, whether pursuing a doctorate is the next most faithful step at this moment in your life, for your community of support, and for your vocational aspirations.

Take your time. Go deep into your questions with the guide close at hand. As Dr. Oredein urges in her poem, “clothe your feet, in moccasins of wonder, and walk.”

Know that you are not walking alone. Know that the FTE community is here to support you throughout your journey, and is committed to you thriving.

Dr. Patrick B. Reyes

Director of Strategic Partnerships for Doctoral Initiatives

Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE)

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section 1

How to Use the Guide

“All meaningful love relations empower each person engaged in the mutual practice of partnership. Between teacher and student love makes recognition possible; it offers a place where the intersection of academic striving meets the overall striving to be psychologically whole.”¹

— bell hooks

One of the most common themes that surfaces in our work with doctoral students is *isolation*. Somewhere along the way, students feel isolated on their campus, in their studies, in their writing, or in their quest to find a meaningful job after graduation. The doctoral journey in our field takes, on average, seven years.

The cohort you will eventually be selected into will be small. The field you will study, despite how it may feel, represents a tiny sample of the many career and vocational options you could have pursued. Finally, only a handful of people will understand what your work actually is, and even fewer will understand why it is important not just to you, but to the world.

Despite all of this, you are (may be) called to pursue a doctorate. You are compelled by some vision for the world or by your own sense of vocation to be a theological and religious educator. To that end, and drawing on the bell hooks quote above, this guide is meant to be a conversation partner for you as you discern your next most faithful step.

The guide is divided into sections. Each provides insights into the various stages of the doctoral journey, with questions and resources for your use in discernment with mentors, advisers, family members, colleagues, and friends.

¹ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 136.

Most importantly, the guide is meant to remind you of something essential. At the end of your journey, you will receive three letters to follow your name. But it takes a community, money, a network of support, an ongoing commitment, and the belief that your work is valued in the world to get you through coursework, exams, and the dissertation.

You are called
to pursue a
doctorate.

This guide is not a “how-to.” This guide does not provide the only pathway to success. Read and work with each section as an exploration of guideposts for your doctoral journey. The sections titled “The Doctorate,” “Programs and Institutions,” “Paying for Your Degree,” “Applying for Programs,” “The Admissions Process,” and “Acceptance and Pre-Work,” are all meant to offer helpful insights, tips, and strategies before you even step foot onto campus. The sections “I Am a Doctoral Student. Now What?” and “Mentoring and Networking,” all highlight what you can expect while you are in your program.

Each program and institution is different, so be mindful that the advice provided should always come third to your institutional handbook and adviser.

Finally, we end with words about the future of the discipline and what you might be able to do with your doctorate. The standard bearer is still a tenure-track position in an institution of higher learning. With the significant changes in theological education and higher education, we have provided information about other career and vocational avenues to stoke your imagination.

Finally, we want to encourage you to use this guide in conversation with your partners and colleagues. Download it. Share it. Fill in the margins. Challenge our assumptions about the doctorate. Consult other experts and mentors. Use the guide as a conversation starter with those who will journey along with you as you pursue a doctorate.

Obtaining a Ph.D. or a Th.D. is no small task. It is one that takes discipline, commitment, and conviction. It is a journey that will profoundly shape the rest of your life. We hope this guide offers valuable tools, tips, and strategies that make that journey a little easier.



section 2

The Doctorate

Why get a Ph.D.?

Obtaining a doctoral degree requires a significant commitment of time and resources, both human and financial. It is important to know one's reasons for pursuing a degree that will take at least four years to complete. The average length to completion is seven years.

For those considering the teaching profession, whether in a private or public college or university, the Ph.D. degree is typically a requirement of full-time teaching, particularly if one is to be considered for tenure. However, the academy may not be the only purpose or destination for a Ph.D. Several organizations that are affiliated with higher education—such as academic publishers and think tanks—may require the Ph.D. as well.

What questions should I ask?

To determine whether pursuing a Ph.D. degree is the right choice for you, here are a few questions and considerations to think about:

- Is this Ph.D. degree in alignment with my vocational goals?
- Am I prepared to spend the next four to ten years committed to a particular course of study?
- Is there a burning question that is calling for greater exploration and am I the person to pursue that question?
- Does the profession I aspire to join require this degree?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions, but they offer a good starting point for your process of inquiry and discernment.

Who should I talk to?

As you begin the process of asking internal questions regarding the doctoral journey, it is equally important to pose questions to others. But where to begin? As with any discernment process, it is often difficult to sift through the multitude of experts who are ready to share their advice on whether pursuing a doctorate is right for you.

Begin with the people who know you well and understand your vocational aspirations. If you are a member of a faith community, perhaps a trusted pastor, minister, priest, or elder would be a helpful conversation partner. If you are considering a Ph.D., you will have (in most cases) completed a master's degree. The faculty and advisers within your master's program can be another resource for guidance, not only on the question of whether to pursue a Ph.D., but also by helping you to choose a path among different programs and options. An undergraduate adviser or chaplain may also be a trusted resource in the discernment process. In addition, students who are currently enrolled in a doctoral program—

particularly those attending an institution or who study with a scholar whose work has piqued your interest—may provide useful insight regarding the joys and challenges of pursuing doctoral education.

Begin with the people who know you well and understand your vocational aspirations.

The main question for you in seeking trusted guidance to assist with your decision is whether the people offering advice know you well enough and will be honest and clear with you regarding the process. In addition, these advisers need to have your best interest at heart, rather than advocate for a particular institution, discipline, or ideology.

Preparation for Doctoral Studies

Many prospective doctoral students foreclose the possibility of a doctoral degree even before submitting an application. They do so because they think they are not prepared for such an intensive and rigorous academic endeavor. How does one prepare for the work that a doctoral program requires, and what attributes are needed?

- Intellectual curiosity
- Love of learning
- Passion for a particular subject
- Clarity of written expression
- Reading for depth and breadth
- Ability to receive critical feedback

To some extent, these are attributes that speak to the process of doctoral work, rather than the outcome (the Ph.D. degree). In other words, pursuing a doctorate must not be based solely on the attainment of the terminal degree, but on one's ability to find fulfillment and purpose in the process itself. Otherwise, the four to ten-year journey may prove to be unsustainable.

Sense of Vocation

Why get a Ph.D.? One way to consider this question is to think about the meaning of the term vocation and its distinctive difference from a job or career. One definition of the term identifies vocation as “a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation,” while another adds, “particularly worthy and requiring great dedication.” Both definitions are rooted in the Latin origin of the term *vocare*—“to call”—which is the same root for voice and advocacy. In this sense, one's vocation is inextricably connected with one's sense of an inner voice seeking a public expression. It is an inner calling in search of an outward direction and purpose.

The pursuit of a Ph.D. degree is a calling forth into the world of one's deep sense of purpose and commitment.

The pursuit of a Ph.D. degree is a calling forth into the world of one's deep sense of purpose and commitment, adding the uniqueness of one's voice to the collective expression of intellectual inquiry. More importantly, it reflects a commitment to join a community of scholars who wish to add to the body of knowledge in ways that make it more reflective of a diverse, global community.



section 3

Programs and Institutions

Doctoral work can take anywhere from four to ten years. If you are going to dedicate that much time and effort to the pursuit of this terminal degree, the conditions in which you will pursue it require serious consideration.

Here are some of the potentially life-saving questions you should ask yourself and the institutions where you might study:

- **Program:** Does the program have doctoral faculty who will mentor and supervise your work in a meaningful way? Does the faculty member you want to work with as your adviser have the capacity to walk with you from the time you enroll to the day you graduate?
- **Institution:** Does the Ph.D. or Th.D. degree from the institution of your choice help you pursue your scholarly and vocational aspirations? If you are interested in research, does the institution provide resources and mentoring for research during the program? If you are interested in teaching, does the program provide teaching opportunities during the program?
- **Position in the field:** Does the program offer world-class support and expertise in your research field through libraries, databases, faculty members, and networks? If you have identified your research interest field, does this institution represent and produce scholars from your desired discipline?
- **Holistic support:** Does the program have adequate funding for studies, research, teaching opportunities, healthcare, housing, professional development, and other types of support?

Does the program have doctoral faculty who will mentor and supervise your work in a meaningful way?

These questions can be answered by visiting a website, calling the admissions office, consulting with academic departments, and contacting the faculty with whom you'd like to work. Most institutions are well-positioned and will be willing to tell you how they meet these conditions. If they do not, that is important information for you as well.

There are many other considerations and questions that are necessary for you to thrive in a doctoral program, including the type of institution where the doctoral program is located. Here are some of those categories:

Research 1 (R1) Institution

This Carnegie classification of colleges and universities indicates that the institution offers a full range of baccalaureate degrees, is committed to graduate education and research, and offers doctorates in a variety of disciplines. There aren't many of these institutions in North America, but R1 institutions typically have additional opportunities, such as undergraduate teaching opportunities and range of faculties from a variety of disciplines to choose from as support.

University-Based Theological School

A university-based theological school is one academic unit among a larger institution of higher learning. Doctoral programs at these schools are typically bound to the policies, procedures, and practices of the larger university system. These doctoral programs come with added benefits of being part of the larger university, such as access to the university library, faculty from other disciplines and departments within the university, and cross-listed courses to advance one's cognate fields. University-based theological schools may be clearly situated within a denomination, such as Catholic, Jesuit universities, while other university-based theological schools may have a more ecumenical or nondenominational identity and emphasize disciplinary integrity.

Independent Theological School

Many independent theological schools offer Ph.D. and Th.D. programs. Depending on your vocational goals, asking questions of these institutions about "what the program prepares you to do" is important. Whereas R1 and theological schools embedded in university systems are, by in large, preparing scholars and

professors for the academy, independent theological schools may identify different vocational objectives. These may include serving the church, not-for-profit leadership, and entrepreneurial vocational pathways. Coursework and campus programs at independent theological schools are typically tailored for graduate students. Since most independent theological schools do not have undergraduate students, teaching opportunities at the undergraduate level are not always offered as part of your program. Finally, independent theological schools are typically identified with a denomination.

Knowing what type of institution you are applying to and how that institution positions itself in the marketplace of theological education can help you identify what graduate program is best for you. For example, if your goal is to teach at a theological school, it is good to know upfront where most professors who teach at theological schools are being trained.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) publishes a report identifying the schools from which the majority of ATS faculty members graduate. In 2015, that report included Princeton Theological Seminary, Harvard University, University of Toronto, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of Chicago, Fuller Theological Seminary, Yale University, and Emory University. Roman Catholic schools and Union Theological Seminary complete the top ten. Some of those schools, such as Harvard University and the University of Chicago, include their embedded theological school doctoral programs alongside their university doctoral programs.

Regardless of the type of institution you choose, it is important to ask what the institution is preparing doctorates to do in the world, and what their graduates are actually doing. Are graduates from these institutions finding vocational fulfillment and full-employment in their respective fields?

If you are going to treat the doctorate like a full-time job, and in some cases more than a full-time job, you will need to be sure that this is the space and the

Asking questions of these institutions about “what the program prepares you to do” is important.

What intellectual, spiritual, and social support does the school offer?

environment that cultivates the conditions for you to thrive—not just as a scholar, but as a human being. Every scholar experiences some burnout. No amount of resilience will completely protect you from the stresses of doctoral work.

Consider the conditions in which you will work. Ask the following questions during your campus visit. In this process, prospective dissertation supervisor(s) and potential colleagues may help

you discern not if a Ph.D. or Th.D. is right for you, but if this particular Ph.D. or Th.D. program is right for you:

- **Program:** What are the expectations of the program? How many courses are required? How many courses are in my field or discipline? Who teaches those courses? Will all of them be offered during my course of study?
- **Adviser in Desired Program:** How available is my potential supervisor? Do they meet with doctoral students once a semester? As needed? What is their engagement style? Do they mentor, coach, advise, or supervise? Or all of the above? How many students do they currently have? What other responsibilities do they have? Do they have a sabbatical scheduled soon? Do they have a particular plan or set of expectations for all of their students in terms of what classes to take, how exams are structured, and dissertation committee make-up? What is the potential supervisor's reputation both on campus and off campus in mentoring, sponsoring, supervising, and guiding their students?
- **Campus Conditions:** What are the conditions of the program? Will the library and research services support you in the scope of your work? Does the school have student housing? Could you live there? Does the surrounding community reflect your values and your culture? Will you have peers and community in the space? Does the institution offer online or distance learning? Do students move away from campus after final exams?

- **Student Cohort Conditions:** How long does it take for students to complete their degrees? Is it more or less than seven years? How much of that time will you work in a cohort and how much will you work alone? What intellectual, spiritual, and social support does the school offer? How big are the cohorts? How many students of color are admitted on average? Where do students typically come from? Is the geographic representation in the student body national in scope or is it regional? How many international students are included? How many students are admitted each year?
- **Outcomes:** What are the objectives of the program? Is the objective to simply produce a unique contribution to the field through the dissertation? Is it to be trained as a scholar-educator? Does the program have alternative pathway objectives, such as non-teaching or research objectives?

Asking the right questions before you apply will save you more than a few application dollars. You will gain clarity about not just what you want to study, but who you want to study with, where you want to study, and for what purpose you will pursue your research agenda.



section 4

Paying for Your Degree

According to ATS, the average annual cost of tuition and fees for an advanced theological research degree (Ph.D. or Th.D.) is \$35,101 at a university-affiliated program and \$15,401 at an independent theological school. Factoring in housing, healthcare, food, research, travel to guild meetings, previous educational and personal debt, and other personal expenses, paying for a doctoral program can have a profound impact on your long-term financial well-being.

So get your calculator out. Seek guidance from your financial institution. Consult with your partners and friends. Talk with your congregation or community. Review your current financial obligations with those who are close to you.

Too often the cost and financial burden of a doctoral program is hidden away as if it is something shameful. Having conversation partners about your finances can help mitigate the isolation many doctoral students feel, as many are drowning in financial debt. Analyzing the full weight of the financial and opportunity costs—which includes the time taken away from relationships or full-time employment—prior to applying and accepting a position in a doctoral program will prepare you to address two of the most important considerations of doctoral work: *How much will my doctorate cost? How will I pay for it?*

So what are the right questions and considerations when it comes to paying for a doctoral degree? Here are some suggestions.

Review your current financial obligations with those who are close to you.

Budgeting

Sitting down to budget how much it will cost for you to enter a doctoral program will aid in your ability to discern whether or not pursuing a doctorate is financially responsible. Below is a sample budget. Some of the assumptions for this budget are that you are enrolled in a Ph.D./Th.D. program at an independent theological school in a medium to large city, and that you will complete your program in six years—one year faster than the average student.

Cost	Year 1	Year 2	Exams Proposal	Exams Proposal	Dissertation	Dissertation	Total Cost of Program
Tuition and Fees	\$15,401	\$15,401	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$36,802
Health Insurance	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$18,000
Student Recreation Fee	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$240
Books and Supplies	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$7,500
Housing and Utilities	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$120,000
Food	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$36,000
Personal/Miscellaneous	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$6,000
Transportation	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$18,000
Travel and Professional Development	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$6,000
Total Cost Per Year	\$50,691	\$50,691	\$36,790	\$36,790	\$36,790	\$36,790	\$248,542

What sort of financial packages does the institution offer?

After you have successfully accounted for and modeled the total cost of your program, you can better understand the implications and responsibilities of the question, “*How am I going to pay for all of this?*”

The first place to look for funding for a doctoral program is your institution.

The first place to look for funding for a doctoral program is your institution.

Does the institution offer a package that includes tuition + a stipend of greater or equal to \$25,000 per year, with at least five years of funding + healthcare + travel/research/professional development stipend + housing + a teaching stipend or research assistantship in the later stages? Only a

few select, competitive, and well-funded programs would offer a package such as this. More often than not, programs will offer a fraction of this, or pieces, or no

package at all.

Remember that the financial award letter you receive upon acceptance is an initial offer. When a program selects you to join their program, it is an indication that they want you in the program. *Do not be afraid to ask for what you need.*

Do you need support for essentials, such as housing, healthcare, and food? Asking for more institutional aid is an important part of learning how to manage your finances and being realistic about the financial implications of pursuing doctoral work. There is no reason to assume that an institution has offered all that it can. There may be more funding available. And if there is no more available funding, the institution's representatives will tell you that directly. So ask!

What other sources of funding might be available outside of the institution?

There are a number of organizations that support scholars of color. Each program offers aid at different stages of the program. Here is a list of just a few of them:

- Charles Gaius Bolin Dissertation Fellowship
- Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowships
- Forum for Theological Exploration Doctoral Fellowships
- Global Religion Doctoral Dissertation Fellowships
- Hispanic Theological Initiative
- Louisville Institute
- Luce Fellowship
- United Methodist Dempster Fellowship
- United Methodist Women of Color Scholars Program

There are a number of denominational and church-related opportunities for funding as well. Go to fteleaders.org/fundfinder for additional resources.

Personal and Community Contributions

As you search for funding for your program, account for what you can contribute to the cost of your program through your personal resources. This will limit the long-term amount for which you are liable. Take a look at your savings. What would it look like to work and save for a while, and then enroll in the program

when you are better positioned financially?

There will come a time when you feel overwhelmed by the burdens of your program.

Accounting early for what you can pay for out of savings or from your current earned income will limit the amount of debt you will have to incur. If you are in a household with more than one income earner, calculate the total amount of income available to help defray the cost of your education.

Pursuing a Ph.D. or Th.D. is a calling and, for many, a dream. If you have family, friends or mentors who have supported you throughout your life, do not hesitate to ask them for modest gifts to help support your pursuit of a doctorate. People who care about you want to see you succeed. Knowing the fixed costs of items ahead of time helps with these requests. For example, instead of asking a family member for \$500, ask them to support you by purchasing some of your books.

If and when you receive support from loved ones and community members, be sure to express gratitude and let them know they offer far more than a financial contribution. Thank them periodically through notes, emails or phone calls updating them on your progress. There will come a time when you feel overwhelmed by the burdens of your program and discipline area. When that happens, call those same financial supporters. This is your support group. With continued engagement, the people in it will continue to invest in you as a future leader in the academy.

Loans

As the cost of graduate education continues to rise, students are turning at an increasing rate toward loans. ATS recently published research that indicates over 50% of African American students are leaving their master's programs with more than \$40,000 in educational loan debt.

Knowing the type, the terms, and the total amount of debt you have already incurred is important for negotiating your financial health. More importantly, having a debt management plan in place to pay for your loans prior to taking on additional debt will provide the peace of mind necessary to focus on your doctoral work.

One of the most common pieces of advice from financial institutions regarding taking on additional student loan debt is to look at the starting salary of the profession you want to enter. If your current total loan amount—including debt for bachelor’s and master’s degrees—exceeds your expected starting annual income, it will be very difficult for you to pay the loan back. For example, in 2015 the average salary for an assistant professor at an ATS accredited institution was \$57,000. If your total educational loan amount is more than \$57,000, it will be very difficult to pay your loans back.

If you have federal loans, be sure to have a long-term plan for the *type* of employment that will best position you to pay off your loans over time. Enrolling in income-based repayment plans through your loan providers can help alleviate both short and long-term financial stress. If you have federal student loans, you can consider enrolling in the public loan forgiveness program. Find out more about these programs at studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans.

Look at the starting salary of the profession you want to enter.

Cost Over a Lifetime

Doctoral students have a hard enough time *talking* about finances, let alone calculating the total cost of a four to ten-year program. Talk to a financial adviser or calculate your own lifetime earnings in the profession. Consider your career earnings with and without a Ph.D. or Th.D.

Though your sense of call to doctoral studies may be great, if the lifetime earning potential is equal to or less than what you would earn over a lifetime by not pursuing a Ph.D. or Th.D., it may be worth considering that tending to your financial health and well-being may be more important than attaining a doctorate. This is especially true if your primary sense of call does not require an earned doctorate. There may be other ways for you to pursue your vocational goals or to supplement your income down the road. Paying for your doctorate is not just a cost in this year’s budget. It is often a commitment of 10 to 20 years, depending on the opportunity cost for this year or how you structured your loan repayment.

How to Calculate Opportunity Cost

Consult a financial adviser or your financial institution to get a picture of your complete financial profile. There are a number of graduate school opportunity cost calculators available online. What most of these models are calculating is the difference between your earning potential now (without the Ph.D. or Th.D.) and your earning potential with a doctorate, accounting for debt incurred during the process of achieving a doctorate. See a sample worksheet in Appendix C.

Talking about the potential total debt load prior to and after a doctoral program is central to making wise and strategic investments in your future.

Assistantships

Many institutions have built into the program research or teaching assistantships. These typically offer a modest stipend. Ask your institution what opportunities for assistantships are available to doctoral students. Be sure to also ask how they are structured. Are they application-based? Are they assigned? Do you get to select or have a say in which faculty or researchers you will be able to work with or what classes you will be assigned to teach?

Working

Depending on how your financial aid package is structured, you may be able to earn additional income while in school. Many institutions or

faculty advisers do not recommend this, because any time away from your course of study and research lengthens the amount of time your doctorate will take.

However, some institutions may encourage you to work to receive additional income, especially in disciplines that prepare you to be bi-vocational or affirm your bi-vocational call. Before you start looking for jobs though, consult with your faculty adviser and your institution about where you might look for additional employment opportunities and what employment opportunities may be available to you on your campus.

Saying “No” or Deferring to Get Finances in Order

It is rare that a guide about getting into a doctoral program would mention the prospect of saying “no,” or suggest deferment. With the rising debt load of doctoral students, we have seen debt load cases from \$0 to well over \$400,000.

In every case, talking about the potential total debt load prior to and after a doctoral program is central to making wise and strategic investments in your future. For those who will enter into doctoral programs while they have family commitments, the investment of time, money, and energy in a doctoral program is an investment that the entire family makes. Ensuring the comprehensive financial health of your family is a vitally important consideration.



section 5

Applying for Programs

Preparing the Application

Once you've decided to take the step of applying to Ph.D. or Th.D. programs, it is essential to prepare an application portfolio that is reflective of your best work. It will demonstrate your potential for doctoral study to those who will be reviewing it. In many ways, the old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," is appropriate to the application process for the doctorate. Care and attention needs to be directed to all aspects of the application, from the online form to the personal statement and everything in between. Every institution has its application due date. It is critical that your application is received prior to that date. From the onset, a late application is not viewed positively; it can become an immediate, and avoidable, mark against you.

Make a plan at least six months prior to the first application due date of the schools to which you are applying. Create a chart that highlights the required components of each application for each school. Here's an example:

Program/School	Due Date	Personal Statement	Recommendations	Online Application	Research Outline	CV	Other
Ph.D./University	Dec 1	Oct 1	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ph.D./Seminary	Dec 15	Oct 15	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ph.D./TheoSchool	Jan 1	Nov 1	3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Program/School: This column assumes that you've already researched the program and school as suggested in section 3 of this guide.

Due Date: It is critically important to keep track of the application due date for each institution. This is the date *before which* they expect to *receive* your materials, and not the date you mail or send them. As you keep track of these dates, it's

helpful to list the schools by order of the application due date, with the earliest date listed first.

Personal Statement: Most doctoral programs require a personal statement that seeks to elicit your interest and capacity for doctoral work. It is helpful to check the box on your chart that indicates such a statement is required and to note the date of its completion. Each application varies with regard to the nature of the personal statement. Some may ask a specific question upon which you must reflect. Others may leave this open-ended for you to add information about you that is not included elsewhere in the application. This is a key component of your application. It must be reviewed and edited with care. Ask a colleague, trusted friend or family member to read your draft. Having another “set of eyes” on this statement can help ensure that you’re addressing the question clearly and are articulating an accurate view of your vocational and professional goals.

Recommendations: Most doctoral programs want to determine whether your description of your interests and goals can be confirmed by others, preferably by those who can vouch for your passion and capacity for doctoral work. It is imperative that you give your recommenders plenty of time to complete their letters. Plan to have the written recommendations in-hand at least three months before the application due date.

Online Form/Research Outline/Curriculum Vitae/Other: Keeping track of all required application components will help you present your most comprehensive portfolio in a consistent fashion. That consistency includes the font style/size of your written materials, the absence of typographical errors, and the quality of writing. It may seem basic and minor, but presenting your best work in the best possible manner is a sure way of making a good “first impression” to the admissions committee of each prospective institution.

Asking for Recommendations

The process of soliciting recommendations can be a wonderful opportunity to constitute a circle of affirmation and support that will continue well into your doctoral journey. At the same time, it can be wrought with challenges, and even disappointment, if sufficient forethought is not given to these questions:

- Who should I ask to write a recommendation on my behalf?
- When should I ask for the recommendation?
- Here's a question you may ask a prospective recommender: Are you willing to write a **strong** letter of recommendation for me? Note: In the absence of a specific ask, professors have been known to agree to write a letter of recommendation that is not strongly supportive and ultimately weakens an application package.
- Tip: It can help to provide your recommenders with copies of your graded papers with their notes to assist them with providing detailed accounts of your academic work and potential for future success as a scholar.

Who to Ask: Your recommendations will provide the doctoral admissions committee with an outside perspective on your ability to do graduate-level work, as well as your prospects for successful completion of a doctoral program. As such, it is critically important that those who recommend you can vouch for you enthusiastically. If you are unsure whether someone can provide an enthusiastic letter on your behalf, then it is best not to take that chance. Few items dampen an application like a lukewarm recommendation letter.

In addition, it is important that your recommenders offer insight into different aspects of your application profile. For example, a graduate professor who taught a class—or classes—in which you were fully engaged and performed well would be able to reflect on your ability to think critically and creatively about the material you are studying. If you enjoyed a positive working relationship with the adviser of your master's degree study, she or he would be able to speak to your dedication and persistence in a rigorous program. If you held a job while attending graduate school and had a good relationship with a supervisor, that person would be able to demonstrate your capacity to successfully handle multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

The process of soliciting recommendations can be a wonderful opportunity to constitute a circle of affirmation and support.

These types of recommendations could provide an admissions committee with a broader view of your application from different perspectives, but with the same underlying message: *This is a strong candidate—academically, intellectually, and personally—who would be an asset to any doctoral program and institution.*

The process of preparing your application, requesting recommendations, and deciding on schools and programs is really a function of telling a story.

When to Ask: The general rule of thumb with regard to requesting recommendations is “the sooner, the better.” You want to demonstrate that you appreciate the time recommenders will be giving toward your application by allowing them as much flexibility as possible.

Even more advantageous would be to request a recommendation close to the circumstances upon which you are asking them to reflect. Given the graduate professor example noted above, the ideal time to ask for a recommendation would be immediately after the class has ended, when your performance in the class is fresh in the professor’s mind. You can ask to keep this letter on file and it will be ready when you’re about to submit your application. If the

doctoral application requires the letter to be sent directly from the professor, then she or he will have already completed it and can simply upload it to the school’s application platform. At all costs, you want to avoid requesting a recommendation less than a month before the application due date. This does not reflect positively on your candidacy and can be avoided with adequate time management of the process.

How many schools/programs should I apply to for admission?

There isn’t a standard answer to this question. Some will say as few as three, while others will say as many as twelve. Rather than simply averaging the low and high end of the spectrum of opinion, you might want to consider the following questions:

- Is there an internal logic to my application to this particular school/program, such as research emphasis, faculty adviser, or other factors?
- Does my application demonstrate a potential fit between the ethos of the school/program and my research trajectory?
- Is the location of the school/program a factor in my ability to accept an offer if made?

While not an exhaustive list, these questions may help you to narrow the number of programs/schools so that those to which you apply will make sense to the doctoral admissions committee *based on your vocational and professional goals*.

One factor that you do not want to use to deter your application to a particular program/school is the prospect of financial assistance. While this is an extremely important consideration when you're deliberating between and among offers, you do not want to foreclose an opportunity because you believe a program or school did not initially offer you a competitive financial package. That is a conversation to be had *after* the institution has accepted your candidacy. At that time, you will be in a better position to negotiate the financial assistance package. If you receive multiple acceptance letters and differing financial assistance packages, be honest with yourself and the institution you would like to attend about what you would need to select that program.

How many schools/programs should I apply to for admission?

Taken together, the process of preparing your application, requesting recommendations, and deciding on schools and programs is really a function of telling a story—your story—and demonstrating the narrative connections among the multiple facets of the application process.

Each part of the application process becomes a chapter in the story of your doctoral journey. The degree to which you are able to tell that story with consistency and seamlessness will determine whether the doctoral admissions team on the other end sees their school/program as part of your narrative.



section 6

The Admissions Process

The dreaded wait!

You prepared your application and sent it off to the institutions, and more specifically, to the programs where you believe you will thrive. From the time you submit your application to the moment you receive your decision letter, there are a number of processes in motion. Every program is slightly different.

Application Evaluation

Let's start with the understanding that admissions teams are not looking for “good” or “bad” applications. If you are applying for a doctoral program, it is assumed that you have met the standards of the institution to which you are applying. These standards include respectable grades and academic standing, excellent GRE scores (if required), stellar recommendation letters, an impressive curriculum vitae that shows promise as a scholar, essays that articulate clarity about why you want to pursue a doctorate in this program, and all of the supplemental materials required of the application.

What varies between institutions is the *weight* of each of these components. Research 1 (R1) and independent theological schools typically weigh things like the GRE differently. For example, R1 schools are held to institutional standards across all of the graduate programs of the larger university. They have less flexibility on determining the minimum GRE score threshold for admission, or perhaps more accurately, the GRE percentile ranking.

For most doctoral programs, a selection committee reviews, rates, and selects candidates for admission. The committee is typically comprised of the director of doctoral programs (or equivalent) and faculty from the program to which individuals apply. However, composition of the selection committees varies based on institutional

practices and policies. Similarly, selection criteria also vary by institution and department.

Selection committees typically consider the:

- Potential contribution the applicant’s research will provide to their field of study.
- Academic achievement thus far as an indicator of future success.
- Institutional fit.

For most doctoral programs, a selection committee reviews, rates, and selects candidates for admission.

For institutional fit, selection committees and committee members ask themselves, “*Will this student work well with their potential adviser, contribute to the larger research of the institution, be a good advisee and colleague, and be able to complete their doctoral degree program?*”

This last point is crucial for both applicants and institutions. When committees consider a doctoral application, this question not only determines whether or not the student will be accepted, but is often used as an indicator of

whether the student will finish the program with distinction.

In FTE’s language, this means, *Will the applicant thrive in this program, with this adviser, with this cohort of students, and at this institution?* At this point in the application process, faculty who would work with an applying doctoral student are considering whether or not they can really support this particular candidate. The selection committee ultimately weighs-in on whether or not an applicant will be admitted. However, unless a faculty member is willing to take on and advise a student, the quality of the application may not ultimately decide whether a student will be admitted.

Campus Interview and Visit

Some institutions do an in-person interview with applicants. Typically, those who are invited to campus to interview with faculty are finalists. One way to think

about this step is to take a moment to recognize that your application, at least on paper, is worthy of acceptance. Now, through the interview process, you and the institution will discern together whether or not this is really a good fit. Here are some considerations to keep in mind for your interview:

- Know what you want to research, who you want to research with, and why this is the institution best positioned to support that work. If you are invited onto campus, faculty selection committees are keen to identify if you have a clear understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of the institution, the program, and the core faculty with whom you will possibly work.
- Be clear about what you will need to thrive in your research and advanced studies. This is not necessarily the time to list your requirements for your potential adviser or program director. It is, however, a time to start listening to those with whom you interview for what the institution can provide to you and your research. Interviews may include questions about your intended work and study. *Are you doing research that requires travel? Do you need access to a particular library or archive that is not located at that institution? Do you need to keep working or want to maintain a bi-vocational approach to your studies?* Questions such as these are opportunities for you to explore what level of support potential advisers and institutions can provide you.
- As in any interview process, be professional. Do not exaggerate accomplishments or needs. Your selection committee and you should both be looking for a conversation partner and future colleague with whom you will work for on average at least seven years. Start off on a good foot!

Best Practices in the Admissions Process

Doctoral programs vary in terms of their preparation for good selection and admissions practices. The Council of Graduate Schools and partnering institutions conducted a program called the “Ph.D. Completion Project.”² The project looked across disciplines and institutions to identify the

Doctoral programs vary in terms of their preparation for good selection and admissions practices.

² <http://cgsnet.org/phd-completion-project>

best practices in recruitment, support and retention, and completion and placement in doctoral education.

Here are a few best practices that emerged:

- **Match or Fit** are of the highest concern. The standards for match and fit are clear and are part of the selection conversation. To disrupt the “old-boy network,” where majority faculty select applicants that look, sound, and mimic their work, best-practices institutions are strategic about how they define “fit” and what the markers and standards of “fit” are.
- **Transparency about outcomes.** Selection committees and applicants are aware of where the outcomes of a program sync or diverge from the vocational aspirations of the applicant.
- **Selection preparation, training, and discussion focuses on institutional aims, mission, and values.** Doctoral programs that can point to the way the selection process supports the mission of the larger institution, coherency with the school’s catalogue, and take into consideration values like diversity and inclusion have greater clarity about who they are selecting. The temptation for some applicant selection processes is to adhere to the guild standards, as opposed to institutional standards. While the applicant will be a colleague in the guild, and in many ways already is, selection committees that focus on whether or not an applicant will thrive in their institution show greater commitment to selecting students who will likely complete their programs and go on to impact their broader field.
- **Institutional support.** The institution provides comprehensive support to the applicant. For example, best-practices institutions provide the financial, writing, and research support that is specific to the doctoral student’s declared or identified needs. In addition, the student is able to find affinity groups at the institution. One insight from an FTE partner and distinguished scholar is that their institution only agrees to take on doctoral students if it can support more than one at a time. This creates a cohort of students who are able to go through the program together.

As you navigate the admissions process, here are some key takeaways from this section:

- Faculty who lead the selection process review your application using a variety of criteria, both explicit and implicit.
- Once standards of academic excellence—as defined by each institution—have been met, faculty committee members then select candidates for admission based on fit for the institution. In the best instances, faculty are assessing if the applicant will thrive at the institution with their desired faculty and in their particular discipline.
- Mutual discernment. If invited to a campus to interview, use it as an additional opportunity to discern if the institution is the best fit for you and your vocational goals.

For more information on the graduate admissions process, read *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping* by Julie Posselt.



section 7

Acceptance and Pre-Work

Congratulations on being accepted to your doctoral program!

This major accomplishment is a testament to your hard work. Before you write back to the institution accepting its offer, consider the following questions:

- Are you going to be able to pursue your questions in the program and with the faculty designated to work with you?
- Did the institution include your essential needs in its acceptance letter, such as housing, healthcare, stipends, and other support, guidance around possible relocation, and other details? If not, did the person sending the letter give you a clear indication of when those details will arrive?
- Are the requirements and stipulations with regard to the course of study, employment during your doctoral program, and commitment of faculty and institution clear?
- Did the institution provide adequate funding to support you through your entire program?
- *Do you really love reading, writing, thinking, and receiving critical feedback enough that you want to dedicate at least the next four to ten years pursuing the credential necessary to continue reading, writing, thinking, and receiving critical feedback as a career?* This question may be a little tongue-in-cheek, but the value of scholarship is not squarely in the affirmation of researching really interesting and difficult topics, asking great questions, or applying critique to original research. The value of scholarship is in the critical and rigorous process of engaging research and writing to advance society.

With that said, doctoral work is not a sprint. It is a marathon. Preparing for that long road ahead develops the intellectual muscle to get you to the finish line. As with any long-term project, it helps to plan and map out how to have a healthy,

Developing a doctoral “first aid kit” for those times when you need to care for yourself or have others care for you is important.

productive, and meaningful doctoral experience. Questions such as, “*Do I have spiritual, social, psychological, intellectual, and physical care practices and resources available to me before I enter into this program?*” are essential to ensuring your health and well-being during the doctoral journey.

The doctoral program is meant to stretch your knowledge of a discipline and a particular topic. That is it. It is not designed to care for your spirit, body, mental health, or your personal relationships. Doctoral students continually report feelings of isolation, marginalization, and exhaustion. Developing a doctoral “first aid kit”

for those times when you need to care for yourself or have others care for you is important.

Here are some helpful considerations:

- What are you taking with you to the program? What are you leaving behind? Include relationships, physical goods, emotions, and memories.
- Does the institution have a certified counseling center? As a student, do you have access to this either through your insurance or as part of student services at the school?
- If your family is accompanying you on this journey, what support does the institution have to offer for family members? What support does your family need from you while you are pursuing your degree?
- Who in your support network is geographically close to the institution?

Practicalities and Logistics

Housing

If you live in the same city and do not have to relocate for your program, that is fantastic news! For those who will enter into a program that requires relocation, there are some important factors to keep in mind. For many of the programs located in large cities, housing can be expensive. Since you will most likely be

operating on a small budget, the traditional advice of spending no more than 30% of your annual income on housing may be a challenge. If housing was not included in your acceptance or financial award letter, contact your institution and the personal contacts you may have in the area. Ask them where doctoral students typically find housing. Consider how far you are willing to commute for your program. During coursework, you will want to be near to the campus for classes. When you are in the exam stage or dissertation stage, you may have more opportunities to live farther away from campus.

During
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Research and Travel

While online communication has provided scholars with a vast network of connection, guild meetings and conferences are still the gold-standard for in-person scholarly engagement.

We encourage you to begin thinking about travel to and from these events as part of your profession. Especially if you are presenting or seeking membership in your respective guild or conference gatherings, you will want to seek funding to attend these meetings. These costs are rarely included in the financial award letter or in program budgets if you are not presenting at guild and conference events. Accounting for these costs early in the process will allow you to plan to attend these important networking events.

Cohort Composition

Ph.D. and Th.D. students report high levels of isolation. Some programs are very intentional about creating a sense of community among those who have been admitted. Others are far less intentional.

Making connections with colleagues who will journey with you from coursework through the defense of your dissertation will provide a support group that will last a lifetime. Participating in a cohort of affirmation and accountability will also help you meet your program's benchmarks and provide conversation partners for navigating, surviving and thriving throughout the doctoral degree process. Ask your institution for the names and contact information for other members of your admitted class. Reach out to them prior to arriving on campus.



section 8

I Am a Doctoral Student. Now What?

Choosing Coursework

You've been accepted into multiple doctoral programs and have made a decision about which one to attend. Now, as a full-fledged student, you need to choose your courses for the most immediate semester, and perhaps for the entirety of the coursework stage of the program.

Where do you begin? This process may seem overwhelming. How do you make decisions about courses if you're unsure about the specific research goals you'd like to pursue?

Your first step will be to have a conversation with your doctoral adviser, who will have a better sense of the scope of the doctoral program and the requirements along its various stages (coursework, comprehensive exams, and dissertation).

In that conversation, you will want to ask first about the courses that are required for the discipline in which you will be receiving the degree. This includes any language requirements that must be completed within the coursework stage.

Second, you will want to ask about the topical requirements for the comprehensive exams, as these may determine which courses you need to take in preparation for that stage. For example, if you are studying in the area of Christian Ethics, will you need to show proficiency in the development of the field in the 19th and 20th

You will want to consider, even at this initial stage, what areas of study can help you discern your research trajectory for the dissertation.

centuries as a component of your comprehensive exams? If so, a course (or more) in this area will be helpful to your studies before you reach the comprehensive exam stage.

Finally, you will want to consider, even at this initial stage, what areas of study can help you discern your research trajectory for the dissertation.

To this end, a coursework grid can be a helpful starting point to visualize the journey. Here is a sample:

Field of study: Bible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required topical courses • Comp support courses • Research interests • Language req(s) 	Fall semester 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Torah • Book of Ezekiel • Literature of exile • Hebrew 	Spring semester 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Prophets • Book of Jeremiah • Postcolonial Biblical criticism • Hebrew
Summer 1 and 2 (coursework requirements)	Fall semester 2 (coursework requirements)	Spring semester 2 (coursework requirements)

Choosing Faculty

By the time you've entered a particular doctoral program, you will have identified faculty within your institution with whom you envision studying. It is important to learn about the scholarly interests and emphases of the faculty so that you are aware of the assets they represent to you and to your own scholarly development. You want to take as many courses as possible with as many different faculty members in your department for a number of reasons:

- You want to give the faculty an opportunity to get to know you, just as much as you want to learn from their scholarship and expertise.
- Learning about the scholarly interests and teaching styles of the faculty allows you to sample broad pedagogies and curricula.
- Most likely, you will serve as a teaching assistant to a faculty member when your coursework is completed. It is important to be familiar with both the content and style of their teaching.

- Faculty may serve as comprehensive exams readers, or as members of oral exam panels and dissertation committees. The more you know about them (and vice versa), the better.

Your institution may be a member of a consortium of schools, which allows you to take courses that count for credit at your home institution, or your program may be part of a department at a larger university. If so, don't pass up on the wonderful opportunity to explore the course options, which may expand your interdisciplinary interests and research possibilities.

It is vital that you consult with the institution's catalogue as much as with your doctoral adviser.

Benchmarking Against the Catalogue

As you are planning the trajectory of your coursework, it is vital that you consult with the institution's catalogue as much as with your doctoral adviser. You will need to explore whether certain courses are only offered in the fall or spring semesters, as that will impact your course map. In addition, you will need to inquire about any research leaves, sabbaticals, or other faculty absences that may predetermine your course plan. You might find that a particular area of interest is not covered in a course offered at your home institution or through a consortium. In such cases, you might want to consider proposing an independent study. This will allow you to dive deeply into a particular subject of interest that will serve your program needs down the road during comprehensive exams and the dissertation stage.

Networking and Presenting Research

Now that you're a doctoral student, you will hear from other doctoral students at different stages of the journey. They will offer you their best and most well-intentioned advice about networking and presenting research, orally and in publication. There are, perhaps, as many different ways of going about this inevitable part of the doctoral process, each with its requisite degree of anxiety and stress! You are not alone in your desire to make the most out of your experience as a doctoral student, including how to position yourself as a viable and attractive candidate for

employment upon completion.

Networking: You've already begun this process with the members of your doctoral cohort and faculty. In other words, you are building relationships with people who are interested in you and whose lives are meaningful to you. There is a

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reciprocal sense of accountability with the cohort of your doctoral program by the very nature of your shared experience. The wider the circle of relationships you extend within the guild of theological education, the more you will build a network of support, affirmation, and encouragement for yourself. The task is then to cultivate these relationships in a truly reciprocal fashion. This means we ask how we can be helpful to others as much as we ask others to be helpful to us. Rather than seeing networking as a “business card exchange,” which is completely transactional,

networking as relationship building is centered on community and care, a life-sustaining necessity of the doctoral process.

Presenting Research: This can be a bit more tricky than networking. Given the competitive market of the academy, doctoral students often find themselves scrambling to have a certain number of presentations and publications on their curriculum vitae before graduation, with a belief that this will make them more attractive on the job market. On the surface, this seems like a good idea, but it can actually become detrimental to a student if approached without significant forethought. It is essential to make sure that these considerations are established before bringing your research into public discourse:

- Your doctoral adviser is supportive of your presentation and/or publication, and has encouraged you to explore such opportunities.
- Your research is fully developed and has been reviewed by scholars in the field.
- The preparation for presenting or publishing has not detracted from your efforts to complete program requirements.

- Your research is part of your doctoral agenda and its presentation/publication is an opportunity to receive welcomed feedback and suggestions.

With this in mind, it is also important to consider the venue in which your research and scholarship will be presented/published. Here are some questions to ponder:

- Is this publication peer-reviewed where I will receive constructive criticism?
- Is this publication considered a quality venue in which I would like my scholarship to be presented?
- Is this conference open to graduate student presentations?
- Will this presentation be expected for submission to a journal of conference proceedings?

The most important part of the doctoral program, now that you are fully invested in it, is moving successfully toward its completion. That is the goal.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey identifies positive habit number two as, “Begin with the end in mind.” This is an instructive kernel of wisdom for doctoral students in relation to coursework, faculty, networking, and presenting research.

Networking
as relationship
building is
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care.

If you keep in mind the goal of receiving your doctoral degree, then the litmus test for all of these elements is whether their pursuit encourages or hinders that goal. Does coursework support comprehensive exams? Do comprehensive exams support the dissertation? Does a presentation based on a comprehensive exam help hone the research to serve the dissertation? Does the preparation of a comprehensive exam for publication help to make the work more incisive and impactful?

All of these questions demonstrate a long view toward the “end in mind,” and each step along the way is a valuable benchmark and support that journey.



section 9

Mentoring and Networking

“Outliers are those who have been given opportunities—and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them.”

— Malcolm Gladwell

The stereotype image of the brilliant scholar working with a lone and genius pupil, passing on wisdom from one generation to the next, simply does not fit today’s reality.

This form of mentoring may help the few, the privileged, and the powerful to gain insider access. But it is not helpful for the cohorts, classes, and individuals who seek out doctoral work to better their communities and themselves.

Author Malcolm Gladwell dismantles the notion that there are individuals who are so uniquely gifted and brilliant that they rise above the rest of their peers. Instead, it is their access to opportunities and mentors that provide them with the support to advance their vocational journey.

Mentoring matters. And it must include far more than just the one-on-one mentoring relationship. If scholars and educators of color are going to be successful, they need a whole community of mentors serving a variety of roles and functions.

The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity has a tool that maps the different types of relationships one needs to have in order to thrive in academia.

If scholars and educators of color are going to be successful, they need a whole community of mentors.

These roles include people who provide the following:

- Substantive feedback from editors, colleagues, and peer reviewers.
- Professional development opportunities with guild members and professional society colleagues.
- Sponsors who support professional vocational development and provide access to opportunities both internal to their institutions and with external mentors.
- Role models in one's discipline and in work-life balance to which students aspire.
- An intellectual community and audiences of academic work that students listen to and value.
- Emotional support from accountability partners who hold students accountable for what they hold most dear, and who create a safe space for students to handle the ebbs and flows of life in academia.

A single mentor cannot fulfill all of these roles, nor should they. In order for you to thrive in academia, you need a *community* of mentoring support that will guide when guidance is needed, direct when direction is needed, care when care is needed, and sponsor when sponsorship is needed.

Regardless of what roles different individuals are playing in your life, all mentoring relationships should be supportive and healthy.

Beyond the Individuals, Know the Networks

As a scholar of color, you must know and be connected to the networks that support your unique needs. Is it your home community? Is it your family? Is it a guild in your discipline or a special committee within that guild? Is it your cohort of peers at your institution? Is it professors or administrators at your school? Is it FTE or one of our partner organizations that supports scholars of color on their vocational journeys?

In truth, all of these networks, and many others, create the conditions for you to thrive.

Identifying the multiple networks that can support you in your work can be invaluable. *Where are the places that you can go to receive mentoring from a number of people on a similar set of questions?*

Guild and professional society meetings are ideal venues for engaging mentors.

For example, if you are thinking about getting into the job market or are new to the market after receiving your doctorate, guild and professional society meetings are not just for presenting professional papers but also seeking job interviews. At these meetings, you are also surrounded by a critical mass of scholars who are employed and represent excellence in your field. Do your research, identify two or three potential mentors, and ask if you can buy them a cup of coffee and talk with them.

You will find that individuals who have found success are often willing to share their insights and wisdom, and will welcome you to the guild. And remember, give mentors the opportunity to say “no.” It is better to sit with someone who is eager to help you navigate your vocational questions than to be with someone whom you admire, but who does not have time or see the value in talking to you.

Bad Mentor-Mentee Relationships

Not all mentoring relationships are good. Here are just a few possible pitfalls to keep in mind when looking for a good mentor:

- **Too Proprietary:** Mentors sometimes treat mentees as if they belong entirely to them. Rather than asking questions and providing a network of support, mentoring relationships that focus on the mentor can further isolate you as a student.
- **Extreme Mentee Loyalty:** Loyalty is certainly not a bad thing. At times, however, out of extreme loyalty, mentees do not seek advice or resources beyond their mentors. This limits a mentee’s access to a broader set of resources and mentors. Good mentors always find ways to broaden their mentees’ networks of support.

What matters most is that the relationship between a mentor and mentee is sacred.

- **Bad Match:** Sometimes a mentor-mentee relationship is simply a bad match. In their book, *Getting Mentored in Graduate School*, W. Brad Johnson and Jennifer M. Huwe illustrate that sometimes personality, communication style, relationship, and work style differences are all factors that can contribute to dysfunctional mentor-mentee relationships.
- **Lack of Shared Sense of Vocation:** Mentor-mentee relationships can also be distorted when the mentor and mentee are not using their relationship to gain clearness on the mentee's sense of vocation. Common observations that come up in these relationships are, "My mentor just doesn't understand what I want to do," or, "I know better than my mentee." Mentees need guidance and access to opportunities that clarify their vocational calling.
- **Lack of Experience:** Another mismatch occurs when a mentor does not have adequate experience to mentor wisely and faithfully. In this case, the mentor and mentee typically tend to be closer in vocational "stage." Peer mentoring is incredibly helpful and important. However, finding a mentor who is more senior in the field is wise if one is seeking technical guidance or advice from someone who has modeled excellence.
- **Mentor Incompetence:** Authors Johnson and Huwe note that there can be a lack of understanding about what mentoring is and is not. For many scholars, how one mentors is a reflection of how one was mentored. Training, researching, and practicing for mentoring are not common among faculty. Many mentors are neither equipped nor have the ability to give proper attention to mentoring. Research and teaching loads often take most of a faculty member's attention. Mentoring, while important, is not tended to as rigorously. Mentors may also not engage in regular feedback loops about how well they are doing as a mentor. All these factors can lead to mentor incompetence, which can damage a mentee's ability to navigate the academy well.
- **Lack of Boundaries:** Mentors and mentees need to establish good boundaries. Crossed boundaries include the exploitation of mentees for their work or labor, romantic relationships, and how both the mentor and mentee navigate their relationship publically. The mentoring relationship should always be transparent.

- **Desertion:** Life can be busy for mentors and mentees. One common pitfall is when one or both abandon the relationship. Whether a mentor or mentee is non-responsive, negligent, or just does not show up for the committed time, the deserted relationship can be damaging far beyond the lost opportunity to connect. For mentees, a mentor deserting the relationship can cause further isolation. When a mentee abandons a mentor, it can cause feelings of anger, and can deeply impact a mentee’s ability to count on the mentor to sponsor or endorse the mentee’s work.

This list of pitfalls could include countless scenarios. What matters most is that the relationship between a mentor and mentee is sacred. The conversations, experiences, and wisdom exchanged provide each person with the energy needed to thrive in the academy.

Practice and Honor Mentoring

Like any best practice, good mentoring must be *prepared for, practiced, and valued*.

A truly excellent mentor helps a mentee find clarity on his or her sense of call or work. The mentor provides support, opportunities, or strategic advice that enables the mentee to turn aspirations into reality. A good mentor—one who is committed to the mentee’s thriving—connects the student with others who can help the mentee or possibly offer further mentoring.

A good mentee is one who acknowledges the mentor’s experience and wisdom, honors the time that the mentor is providing, and sees the mentor as a person committed to their well-being and not just a means to an end.

Like many relationships, the mentoring relationship is complicated. It can change over time. In the academy, the mentoring relationship is still one of the most important relationships an early-stage scholar will form in his or her lifetime.

Take time to care for this relationship and dedicate the time and practice to its improvement. As scholars, we must strive to be excellent in all of our work. Mentoring is no exception.



section 10

I Want to Be Your Mentor. We Want to Be Your Mentor!

An Open Letter from Shanell T. Smith

Assistant Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins

Hartford Seminary

FTE Fellow ('07, '09, '11)

I've been there. I know about the anxieties. I know about the pressure from peers, family, and friends who wonder why you need to do *more* schooling. I can relate to the stress of waiting to hear if you have been accepted into a program, how much funding you would receive, and wrestling with how selfish it feels to uproot your entire family and relocate to the locale of your institution.

I get it, but guess what. I made it. *We* made it. As one of many FTE Alumni, I can tell you that we have not only successfully earned our degrees, we have also done so with and in *most* of our right minds. You see, we were taught to think about who we are, to consider our various vocational identities and how they influence the way we think and teach, all the while keeping the communities to which we hold ourselves accountable forever in the forefront of our minds. We were also given the tools and strategies to complete our doctoral programs in the most efficient and life-giving way—all of which you will find in this guide.

Most importantly, we were given the opportunity to form relationships with other doctoral students, faculty and administrators of color, and even personnel from academic societies. If you attend *any* FTE event where any of these individuals are present (or if you call FTE's national office for a referral), I can almost guarantee that they are open to be in conversation with you about any aspect

of your academic journey.

We want to stay connected with you because you are the scholars in the pipeline. You are the ones who will continue to shape the scholarship that informs the dialogue and actions that influence our world. Make your work accessible to those “on the ground.” We also want to see you thrive as a person. We want you to form and maintain relationships with your family and friends. We also want to encourage you to find a therapist so that you can *continue* to remain strong on this difficult, isolating, and stressful journey (*ijs*).

I know about
the anxieties. I
know about the
pressure.

You. Are. Not. Alone. Reach out to us. I, for example, do not need pleasantries when you send an email. It doesn't matter if I have never met you, or if we haven't spoken for months. All you have to do is put “FTE” in the subject line, and in the words of singer John Mayer, “*Say what you need to say.*”

I get it...sometimes things are so tough that you forget that *you got people*. But that is why building a community of folk that you stay connected with on a regular basis is key: they can hold you accountable.

So stay encouraged. We want to mentor you. I want to mentor you. The ball is now in your court.



section 11



Future Opportunities for Scholars of Color

Having a Ph.D. or Th.D. does not restrict you to research and teaching. The skills and discipline attained in the process of getting the doctorate prepare you for many opportunities outside of the academy.

Taking inventory of these “multiple pathways” is key. It will help you see how the doctorate can launch you to do the work you feel most called to do. It can also provide a look at other avenues for you to fulfill your sense of call.

With the exception of a few select institutions, the number of positions and vacancies in higher education has dropped dramatically in the last decade. Through mapping your skills and passions, you can begin to imagine the number of roles you are uniquely situated to serve.

All of this starts with answering a few questions:

- *What is it that you love to do in your doctoral work?* Is it researching new and emerging trends in the world? Is it reviewing and investigating lost artifacts? Do you enjoy engaging intellectual concepts and ideas? Are you called to writing and editing as a profession?
- *What are the skills you developed based on those passions?* Did you learn to use software or hardware tools that aided your research or classroom work? Are you uniquely qualified to build, analyze, or deconstruct large data sets? Do you have a gift for translation?
- *What experiences did you have prior to your doctoral work or during your work that inform how you approach your sense of vocation?* Did you work in different industries? Did you travel? What are your non-academic training certifications?

All of these questions and more can expand your vocational horizon and open up career pathways. When you take inventory of your skills, experience, and education, you will also be prepared to talk to those outside of the academy about why you are uniquely qualified for those positions, and why having a doctorate provides another set of skills that will prove useful in the post.

Remember, no one inside or outside of the academy values your doctorate simply because you completed the program. What potential employers want to know is how your skills, experience, and knowledge will add value to the institution or organization.

This list highlights potential fields for those holding doctorates.

Tenure Track Professor. This is still the gold standard for the Ph.D. or Th.D. and is what your program prepares you to do. Your institution will have many resources in helping you navigate this vocational pathway. As you prepare for this track, it is important to know the benchmarks and markers of excellence. Talk with tenured professors about what preparing a tenure track portfolio looks like at different types of institutions. This will help clarify your sense of vocation. For example, if you want to research and publish in top-tier, peer-reviewed journals, an R1 or university-embedded institution would be a good fit. If you want to focus on teaching and service, a teaching college, free-standing seminary, or community college might be a good fit. Discerning what these markers of excellence are will help focus your networking and job search efforts.

Having a Ph.D. or Th.D. does not restrict you to research and teaching.

Higher Education Administration. If you can identify your call early enough, higher education administration offers you opportunities in a growing field. Many schools are increasing the number of administration jobs on their campuses. While the skill sets for this area are related to those used in the pursuit of doctoral studies, the skills needed for administration are very different than those of a research professor. Universities and theological schools offer a number of administrative jobs, from deans in academic and student affairs to directors of

programs and centers. These roles do not always include teaching or research, and they are indeed a *different profession* than the professoriate. But they still provide an opportunity for you to bring your subject matter expertise and passions to building the processes and cultural ethos that you want your institution to embody.

Private and Public Secondary Education. Depending on the state and the credentialing requirements, private and public secondary education is another avenue for those with doctorates. While you will still be in the classroom, these

appointments do not come with the added burden of publishing and higher education tenure requirements. Faith-based secondary schools are also constantly looking for highly qualified teachers and administrators, though some requirements may include denominational certification.

What potential employers want to know is how your skills, experience, and knowledge will add value.

Publishing. This is a rapidly changing field. Whether it is the printing and distribution of scholarship or popular publications, or innovating the delivery method of content through online and digital media, the techniques and tactics of publishing offer an ideal avenue for those who

want to impact how people think about their field—both within and beyond the academy. Aside from research, publishing houses are also developing new content and delivery methods for materials across disciplines, areas, and public audiences. Whether the focus is standardized testing, textbooks, or popular publications, you and your doctoral studies skills could bring thorough review and subject matter expertise to a publishing house.

Government or Nonprofit Organization Leadership. Both the government and the nonprofit sectors have jobs that require subject matter experts—especially those who are culturally competent and can deliver on multi-year projects and initiatives. A doctoral program prepares you for a number of roles and occupations leading organizations that design and deliver public services. These organizations include governmental offices, foundations, charities, nongovernmental organizations, and others. The nonprofit sector needs capable

leaders in your particular area of interest who can direct, administer, and write grants and contracts to engage potential partners.

Entrepreneurship and Consulting. Those who have taken the time to pursue and obtain a doctorate have demonstrated that they know how to complete a long, complicated, and multi-year project. They also know how to constructively respond to peer review and criticism. Your ability to research market and constituent needs—and then design services and products that respond to those needs—offers you an additional pathway that capitalizes on your skills and generates revenue. The field of social enterprise and experimentation to serve the public good is filled with opportunity and meaning. Find out more by connecting with DO GOOD X (dogoodx.org), FTE’s new faith and social enterprise initiative.

appendix a

The Ph.D. and Me: A Discernment Exercise for Students

Designed by:

*The Reverend Dr. Shively T.J. Smith (FTE Fellow '02, '03, '08, '12)
Assistant Professor of New Testament
Wesley Theological Seminary*

*Matthew Wesley Williams
Vice President of Strategic Initiatives
Forum for Theological Exploration*

This writing exercise asks students to answer a series of questions in five categories: 1) scholars & books, 2) methodologies, 3) graduate programs, 4) personal experiences, and 5) vocational goals. Each category contains a brain-storm question for which students will have one minute to list responses. Each category also has a follow-up reflective question for which students will have five minutes to provide a written response.

At the close of this exercise, participants will have explored important questions related to their goals. This exercise can be used as a tool for discernment as students clarify the influences and aspirations driving their pursuit of an advanced degree. These questions are also designed to help participants generate content that may be used to craft a strong personal statement for an application to graduate programs.

Category 1: Scholars & Books

Brainstorm: List the scholars and books that have most influenced the questions that are driving your interest in pursuing a Ph.D.

Reflection: What are your primary research questions? How have each of these thinkers and texts informed those questions?

Category 2: Methodologies

Brainstorm: List the fields and disciplines in which the above-mentioned thinkers and texts are located.

Reflection: What theoretical methods do they employ and in what ways do you find them useful for your research interests?

Category 3: Graduate Programs

(3a: Prospective Students/ 3b: Doctoral Students)

3a. Brainstorm: List the names of graduate programs to which you are considering applying. In each case list at least one scholar in that program with whom you intend to work.

3b. Brainstorm: List the names of potential members of your dissertation committee.

3a. Reflection: Discuss the research interests of the scholar(s) with whom you would work in each program. In what way does their research align with your own interests and questions?

3b. Reflection: Discuss the research of the potential members of your committee. In what ways might their research contribute to your own research agenda and interests?

Category 4: Personal Experiences

Brainstorm: List the names of people, places, organizations, and institutions that have shaped you intellectually.

Reflection: Pick one name from the list and discuss that individual's influence on your personal and intellectual formation.

Category 5: Vocational Goals

Brainstorm: Rank in order, 1-5, the major professional activities and goals you feel called to undertake and achieve.

Reflection: What contribution would that activity or accomplishment make to your chosen field or discipline?

Key Questions

The following questions are intended to help you consider what your experience of this exercise suggests. The questions explore possible areas of strength and opportunities for research and learning as you prepare to apply to graduate programs. They may also be useful to begin dialogue with trusted advisers in the field about your preparation for graduate study.

- How was this experience for you?
- What did you discover during this exercise?
- Were there any surprises?
- What did your responses suggest about who you are and what you bring to the academic enterprise?
- Where were you most confident in your responses?
- Where were you least confident?

appendix b

Designing Your Strategic Plan

*Developed in collaboration with FTE summer faculty,
with special thanks to Matthew Wesley Williams and Dr. Reginaldo Braga.*

A terminal program entails more than simply taking courses and completing a dissertation. It can be pursued effectively only when substantial provision is made for maximizing your use of all resources available to you in light of your sense of vocational identity, professional goals, and your community(ies) of relationality and accountability.

This document will help you draft a self-designed roadmap for the pursuit of your program. It is a companion to your learning journey.

Your learning journey is centered on skills, knowledge, and attitudes that you want to intentionally develop toward mastery. This exercise focuses on the recognition, organization, and sequencing of the resources you need to thrive while you complete your program and progress on your vocational path.

After you prepare this strategic plan, save it for reference and review. Revise it periodically during the course of your doctoral program.

Remember, this strategic document is just a *roadmap*. Walking *any* territory is different from reading the map. Your plan will likely need to be updated once you have walked a bit further within the territory of your program.

Use this as an ongoing tool for discernment and for tracking your needs and vocational development.

Your strategic plan should help reach these aims:

1. To connect the design of your coursework to the later stages of your program, which include comprehensive exams, and proposal and dissertation writing.
2. To develop a personal mentoring network that includes faculty within and beyond your institution, getting to know them well, and being known well by them.
3. To establish life-giving personal and professional relationships with other students in your specific institution and in FTE's network.
4. To make extensive use of professional and academic associations and conferences recommended by your mentors.
5. To make extensive use of your institution's and FTE's resources, such as libraries, special programs, on-campus institutes/centers, institutional grants, and extramural funding sources.
6. To attend and participate in special meetings and programs that are available to you in your institution, within the field, and with FTE.
7. To work closely with a dissertation adviser and/or committee in connection with dissertation planning, development, and completion.

Useful Working Prompts to Prepare Your Strategic Plan

As you prepare to draft your strategic plan, take some time with the following steps and questions:

1. Outline your program phases, requirements, timeline, people involved, and to whom you are accountable for the elements of each phase.
2. Looking at your research interests, how would you design your coursework? In addition to coursework, how would you integrate the other available resources, including special conferences, workshops, and symposia,

whether national or international?

3. List the mentors, advisers and/or sponsors currently involved in your project, both in the U.S. and internationally. Are there any potential mentors, advisers or sponsors with whom you would like to connect? What role do you envision them playing in helping you to navigate and complete the program you outlined in step #1? See list of roles in section nine, Mentoring and Networking, page 41.
4. List professional associations and societies with which you wish to associate, current and aspiring, U.S. and international. What type of involvement do you intend to have in these networks? How do you envision that involvement supporting your pursuit of degree completion and professional development?
5. To what communities are you related and accountable with regard to your research, scholarship, teaching, and service? In what ways might these communities be broadened? How do you intend to remain connected with these multiple communities over the course of your program?

appendix c

ROI on Ph.D. / Th.D.⁴

LIFETIME EARNINGS WITHOUT PhD				LIFETIME EARNINGS WITH PhD		
Year	Salary	Annual Raise		Year	Salary	Annual Raise
1	\$45,000.00	1.02		1	-	1.02
2	\$45,900.00	1.02		2	-	1.02
3	\$46,818.00	1.02		3	-	1.02
4	\$47,754.36	1.03		4	-	1.02
5	\$49,186.99	1.03		5	\$57,000.00	1.03
6	\$50,662.60	1.03		6	\$57,000.00	1.03
7	\$52,182.48	1.03		7	\$58,710.00	1.03
8	\$53,747.95	1.03		8	\$60,471.30	1.03
9	\$55,360.39	1.03		9	\$62,285.44	1.03
10	\$57,021.20	1.03		10	\$64,154.00	1.03
11	\$58,731.84	1.03		11	\$66,078.62	1.03
12	\$60,493.79	1.03		12	\$68,060.98	1.03
13	\$62,308.61	1.03		13	\$70,102.81	1.03
14	\$64,177.87	1.03		14	\$72,205.89	1.03
15	\$66,103.20	1.03		15	\$74,372.07	1.03
16	\$68,086.30	1.03		16	\$76,603.23	1.03
17	\$70,128.89	1.03		17	\$78,901.33	1.03
18	\$72,232.75	1.03		18	\$81,268.37	1.03
19	\$74,399.74	1.03		19	\$83,706.42	1.03
20	\$76,631.73	1.03		20	\$86,217.61	1.03
21	\$78,930.68	1.03		21	\$88,804.14	1.03
22	\$81,298.60	1.03		22	\$91,468.27	1.03
23	\$83,737.56	1.03		23	\$94,212.32	1.03
24	\$86,249.69	1.03		24	\$97,038.68	1.03
25	\$88,837.18	1.03		25	\$99,949.85	1.03
26	\$91,502.29	1.03		26	\$102,948.34	1.03
27	\$94,247.36	1.03		27	\$106,036.79	1.03
28	\$97,074.78	1.03		28	\$109,217.89	1.03
29	\$99,987.03	1.03		29	\$112,494.43	1.03
30	\$102,986.64	1.03		30	\$115,869.26	1.03
Lifetime Earnings	\$2,081,780.49			Lifetime Earnings	\$2,135,178.07	

DIFFERENCE IN EARNINGS: \$53,397.57

COST OF DEBT: \$138,097.00 (Assuming loans were \$100,000 at a 6.8% interest rate paid over ten years.)

NET ROI: -\$84,699.43

⁴ See Laura Shin, "Is Grad School Worth It? 7 Steps To Calculating The ROI?"

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurashin/2014/09/30/is-grad-school-worth-it-7-steps-to-calculating-the-roi/#4daa9d1670a3> for more information.

acknowledgements

FTE is a village, a true network of scholars of color. This guide is one expression of the FTE community providing the next generation of scholars of color with the resources they will need to survive and thrive in their doctoral programs.

We could not do this work on our own. It is shared work.

This guide was created with many outstanding contributions from Dr. Teresa Delgado, who served as a co-author and editor.

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FTE is also grateful for the partnership of the Lilly Endowment for advocating for the future of theological education by supporting scholars of color and the organizations that journey alongside them.

A number of other partners, FTE Fellows, scholars and potential doctoral students provided feedback on this guide, and we greatly appreciate their involvement. In the first iteration of the guide, we treated it as an “open source” tool, truly developed in collaboration with several dozen students and scholars.

They generously provided critical feedback and prototyped many of the components in their own mentoring and discernment conversations.

Finally, FTE wants to acknowledge the elders who in 1968 set out to create conditions for scholars of color to thrive in the academy. They did so by starting the first FTE Fellowship for scholars of color pursuing doctoral education. This guide honors and builds upon the legacy and history they created, and the work we are so fortunate to advance.

*Inspiring Leaders to
Shape the Future*



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