

CELEBRATING **20** YEARS

BREITMAN-DORN
RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP



PA FOUNDATION



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

BREITMAN-DORN RESEARCH FELLOWS

1999 Roderick Hooker

2001 Lisa Alexander

2002 Randy Daniels

2004 Dawn LaBarbera

2005 Perri Morgan

2006 Rosann Ippolito

2007 Justine Strand de Oliveira

2008 Jennifer Coombs

2009 Carol Biscardi

2010 James Carlson

2011 Christine Everett

2012 Karen Graham

2013 Alison Essary

2016 Virginia Valentin

2017 Tamara Ritsema

2018 Bettie Coplan

BREITMAN-DORN RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The **Breitman-Dorn Endowed Research Fellowship** was established in 1998 through a generous donation from Jerald A. Breitman in memory of his partner Stephen Dorn. The endowment encourages a commitment to research on the PA profession and provides financial assistance to doctoral candidates who are contributing to research on the influence of PAs on medical care. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded the fellowship to 16 individuals.

In celebration of the fellowship's 20th anniversary, the PA Foundation reached out to former recipients to find out where they are now and what being a **Breitman-Dorn Research Fellow** means to them—from the impact of the fellowship on their doctoral experience to the role their doctoral degree has played in their career path. We've compiled their responses here.

When you support the PA Foundation, you're supporting programs like these fellowships, which give PAs new opportunities, motivation, and confidence; provide them with a community of support; and open doors for more work that benefits the PA profession. Help empower this important research today.

DONATE NOW!



RODERICK HOOKER

1999

What was your research topic?

“Cost-Benefit Analysis of Physician Assistants”

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

Research opportunities opened up and by accepting new employment I was able to meet the opportunity cost of my graduate education within a year. I was able to independently lead research studies instead of being a research assistant.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

The road to a doctorate is long, arduous, and paved with abandoned scholarship. Don't start the Ph.D. process before you consider all the obstacles and rewards that may come from it. Is it the intellectual environment you seek or is it the title after your name? Finally, learn in depth the theories that support your field of endeavor and try to advance that field of knowledge.



LISA ALEXANDER

2001

What was your research topic?

“Variations of Professional Identity Over Time: A Study of Physician Assistants.” The research used cognitive mapping techniques to describe the evolution of the identity of a profession.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

The fellowship provided me the opportunity to engage in a qualitative research study that essentially grew into a longitudinal research project that could continue long after I completed my doctoral degree. Qualitative research provides incredibly rich data that requires hours of transcription and analysis. The funding provided support for this portion of the research that allowed me to focus on the data collection and analysis. More importantly, it allowed me to develop a new skill set as a researcher.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

My path in academia was fairly well established; however, the doctoral degree provided me with an important credential for my future trajectory. In addition, my grant funding opportunities expanded, which further advanced my level of scholarship and promotion to full professor.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

The journey of professional advancement coupled with intellectual curiosity is an exciting one! The rigor of a doctoral program should provide all PAs with the stamina and preparation to contribute to the profession in important ways. Whether it is research related to education, workforce, or policy, the findings help to advance the entire profession.



RANDY DANIELSEN

2002

What was your research topic?

This quantitative study measured the predictive value of a comprehensive summative evaluation instrument to test results on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE).

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

It allowed me to use funds to utilize research and statistics consultants to enhance my dissertation.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

It opened the gate for me to move into health professions education leadership and, in particular, the deanship of a large health professions school.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

I highly encourage PAs to consider pursuing a doctorate if you are interested in moving up in health professions education and pursuing the scholarly activity important for our profession.



DAWN LABARBERA

2004

What was your research topic?

“Physician Assistant Holland Codes as Determined by the Self-Directed Search Form R and Vocational Satisfaction” examined PA vocational satisfaction and Holland vocational codes of PAs satisfied and not satisfied with their careers and specialties.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

Did not directly impact “doctoral experience” per se, but this Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship honor was better than graduation! I donated some of the money back to the PA Foundation to “pay it forward.” The national recognition for my dissertation work makes it visible and those researching PA vocational satisfaction reference this work.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

The doctoral degree opened many opportunities in PA education. As a doctoral-degree-holding PA program director (with this additional distinction for my dissertation work), I was respected at my academic institution. I also was able to move up to professor rank and gain tenure. I have been able to participate equally at the academic table amongst other health care and non-health care disciplines. I have served on several doctoral committees. It is so exciting to be part of another educational process for them and see the amazing things they have accomplished (including another Breitman-Dorn Fellow).

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

Find a mentor to keep you motivated as well as clear reason(s) for earning your doctoral degree, so your goal is not deterred. Choose committee members wisely for comps and dissertation, particularly your outside-the-institution committee member.



PERRI MORGAN

2005

What was your research topic?

“Impact of PAs on Office Visit Resource Use.” I used MEPS data to compare annual office visits between patients with no PA visits with those for whom at least 30% of visits were to PAs. Results showed that use of PAs did not increase office visits.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

It was encouraging to receive this award.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

I became a health services researcher and Director of Research at Duke.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

I recommend not going part-time as I did. It is better to immerse yourself in a department so that you become involved in several research projects and can benefit from mentoring.



ROSANN IPPOLITO



What was your research topic?

“State-Mandated Private Payer Reimbursement for PA Provided Medical Services: A Policy Analysis.” The study was a health policy analysis of the factors that contributed to enactment of a state mandate.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

The fellowship provided a network of scholarly colleagues who served as resources for sage advice and guidance. Communication with past Breitman-Dorn Fellows was invaluable throughout the doctoral journey and especially important during the dissertation phase.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

My Ph.D. is in Law, Policy, and Society, which was an interdisciplinary doctoral program. The experience afforded the opportunity to view health care issues through the lens of disciplines such as the law, sociology, political science, and economics.

At the time of my fellowship, I was a principal faculty member in the Northeastern University PA Program and a doctorate was required for promotion within the institution. Soon after receiving my Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.), I became the PA program director. The organizational culture in the world of academia is different from that of PA clinical practice and degrees do matter. Research skills and the doctorate afforded this PA educator a “seat at the table”; they opened doors to opportunities for scholarly collaboration that were not previously available without the advanced degree.

After decades as a PA faculty member, I transitioned to a position in hospital administration at an academic medical center. As the Manager of PA Education at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, I serve as the “go-to” person for research-related questions in PA Services. The skills and perspectives gleaned from my doctoral studies now contribute to the professional development of clinically practicing PAs, PA students, and pre-PA candidates at the Brigham.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

Find a mentor who has navigated the doctoral process. It is a journey and it is critical to have the wisdom and experience from someone who has gone before you. As my very wise mentor once told me: “If you plan to be successful and make an impact in PA education at the university, you need to have a Ph.D.” For PAs not employed in PA education, a doctoral degree is one pathway for professional development in our pursuit of lifelong learning. I was fortunate to have several mentors along the way. In addition to PA mentors, there were individuals from diverse disciplines who helped shape my career. As highlighted previously, the experience opens doors for collaboration and you never know where that may lead!



JENNIFER COOMBS

2008

What was your research topic?

“Factors Associated with Physician Assistant Practice in Rural and Primary Care in Utah”

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

The most important thing the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship did for me was put me in contact with my future mentor, Perri Morgan, PA-C, Ph.D., who had previously received the award.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

Because I earned my Ph.D. in public health at my home institution, the University of Utah, the doctorate has opened doors within the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine I never would have had otherwise.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

Find a quality mentor, then mentor the next person down the line.



CAROL BISCARDI

2009

What was your research topic?

My research evaluated whether there was a difference in career satisfaction between men and women PAs based on lifestyle choices, such as household tasks, working part-time, and changing specialties.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

Receiving the fellowship award eliminated some of the doubts that are associated with the doctoral process. It was a validation from my peers and a recognition that doctoral research is important to the profession from someone who was invested in championing PA research (Mr. Breitman).

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

The degree did not shape my career path, but it changed how other academics view PA educators.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

The advice of my mentor is so applicable to everyone struggling to finish—when you are done, this is something no one can take away from you; it is your work!



JAMES CARLSON

2010

What was your research topic?

"Evaluation of Transactive Memory Systems During Simulated Health Care Team Training" was a research project and protocol developed to attempt to measure team trust, role specialization, and coordination between PAs and physicians.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

Receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship had a significant and positive impact on my doctoral experience and emerging research agenda. At the time I was exploring teamworking theories that would translate well to the physician-PA relationship and provide a framework for how to evaluate and measure a healthy and effective relationship versus one that was less so. The model helped to explore teamworking behaviors and their impact on group cognition and action taken during patient care. While it was only studied in a simulation-based environment, the model did lend insight into how the development of trust, role specialization, and deliberate coordinating actions could improve patient care and team awareness/function. The lessons learned from this pilot study provide a framework that influenced the final research questions and methods used in my completed dissertation.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

Earning my Ph.D. was an essential element to my career path. Yes, the degree opened doors to new positions and brought credibility to some of the work I was doing, but mostly the lessons learned while earning my Ph.D. have translated to a successful path since. I gained a firm understanding of what it takes to perform meaningful research and established a research agenda that has shaped my career since. In my current role, I oversee Interprofessional Education and Simulation at our organization, and the lessons learned through study of teamworking and methods (simulation) to teach and assess teamworking meaningfully in a health care setting were invaluable. I use many of the methods and techniques perfected during my dissertation research and proven to impact learning in my current classroom and with colleagues today.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

Consider carefully how this will impact your career and your goals. Avoid the "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality in thinking you must have a Ph.D. just like someone else. It was a challenging and very meaningful experience that taught me the skills and lessons to succeed, and that was the value of the Ph.D. The degree is nice, but the lessons learned were career changing.



KAREN GRAHAM



What was your research topic?

Development and initial validation of a measure of intention to stay in academia for PA faculty.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

The biggest impact of the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship for me was the validation of my peers. It came at a time when I was questioning my research – questioning whether it was even possible to develop a measure of intention to stay in academia using Rasch methodology and whether that measure would be meaningful to my PA peers. Receipt of the fellowship validated my concept and motivated me to complete the process.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

Although not required on a non-tenure track, having a doctoral degree was helpful in my promotion to full clinical professor this year. It also gives me the opportunity to move into a tenure track position if I would like and opens other doors within a traditional academic institution where the Ph.D. is considered the terminal academic degree. Additionally, once I am past this season of life with young children, I plan to pursue a leadership position within PA education, so I know that the doctoral degree will be invaluable at that point in my career.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

Don't give up! Making time to work on your dissertation needs to be a priority if you are going to successfully complete it. Schedule blocks of time on your calendar each week to work on the dissertation and do this until you have all your committee signatures on your final version!



VIRGINIA VALENTIN

2016

What was your research topic?

Understanding the internal and external factors that influenced the stage of melanoma diagnosed and how it was treated in Kentucky. One factor evaluated was provider density.

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

The money of course helped with expenses, but it impacted my experience in that this award has become a bit of the “who’s who” in the PA world. It is a small group of PAs who have doctoral degrees and so to be named a Breitman-Dorn Fellow is now standing on the shoulders of amazing people who have come before you. That was validating for me.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

It has dramatically shaped my career path in opportunities that have been opened for me. I have had specific positions available to me due to my degree and research interest at my institution. Also, I have had the opportunity to be an AAPA-PAEA research fellow.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

I highly recommend PAs consider getting a doctoral degree. I recommend that you decide first what is your goal (i.e. letters behind your name, leadership skills, research skills) and then find the degree that fits this purpose. I also suggest that you research what is available to you and what is possible. It is difficult getting your doctorate while working full time so be realistic. Lastly, be sure it is something that you personally are interested in. There will be a lot of pressure from different directions regarding what you should study. Be sure it is something you love.



TAMARA RITSEMA

2017

What was your research topic?

“Barriers and Facilitators to the Integration of the First UK-trained Physician Associates on a Secondary Care Service in the British NHS”

How did receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impact your doctoral experience?

It enabled me to hire a very high-quality British transcriptionist, which allowed me to maximize the quality of my data for a qualitative study. It also gave my research more visibility within my institution and within the U.S. and international PA community at large.

How did getting a doctorate shape your career path?

I just defended three weeks ago, so nothing yet.

What advice do you have for others who are considering pursuing a doctorate or are in the process of doing so?

You need to work on your research every day. If you confine it to one day per week, it takes too much time to remember your thoughts from a week ago. When you do it every day, you can easily pick up your work each day and make good progress. Keep a notebook with all your random thoughts about your research and review it occasionally. No matter how useless you think the idea might be, write it down for later consideration. There are often good ideas in there that you can use later in the process.



BETTIE COPLAN



Bettie Coplan, MPAS, PA-C, is an associate clinical professor in the department of PA studies at Northern Arizona University's College of Health and Human Services. She is pursuing an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in nursing and health innovation at Arizona State University. Coplan's dissertation is entitled "How PA Programs Successfully Promote Diversity in Admissions." The purpose of the study is to explore organizational characteristics reflected in holistic review practices that lead to diverse student enrollment. Questions that will be addressed include: 1) "What specific admissions processes do programs that enroll high proportions of underrepresented minority (URM) students use (e.g. for screening of applicants)?" and 2) "What attributes of organizational culture support these processes?" The study utilizes a qualitative design and multiple case study methodology to examine the admissions processes at PA programs with high URM enrollment (when accounting for regional population demographics). Results will be used to create recommendations and intervention strategies to facilitate effective use of holistic review in PA program admissions. The overall goal is to make a substantive contribution to the profession's efforts to promote a diverse workforce.

How is the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship impacting your doctoral experience?

As anyone who has pursued a doctoral degree knows, the experience is a challenging one. In addition to fulfilling demanding academic requirements, one must consider how to manage educational expenses and costs associated with conducting meaningful research. My dissertation study, which involves in-depth analyses of PA program admissions processes, required a significant financial commitment, including funds to travel to and spend time at participating programs, transcribe interviews, and purchase qualitative research software. Receiving the Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship alleviated any concerns I had about the ability to pursue my study, and I have been able to focus on the research itself. Consequently, the Fellowship has strengthened my ability to complete high-quality work. Additionally, as a Breitman-Dorn Research Fellowship recipient, I have received tremendous support from the PA research community.



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