

Lecture title: PhD value: what is the doctorate for? Comparative responses from South Africa and Mauritius

Name: Professor Michael Anthony. Samuel

Title: Professor, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Abstract:

The doctoral degree is oftentimes mooted as a significant activator of economic development of a society. However, tracking of PhD from the “world of academia” into the “world of work” has been given varied attention in developing world contexts. Little is known about the kinds of economy outside the formal industrial, business or the academic communities to which the PhD contributes. Do PhD graduates use their newly developed competences to promote socially relevant agendas?

Drawing on my experience of doctoral studies in the field of education, this paper presents a comparative perspective of two developing world countries: South Africa and Mauritius to examine their interests in promoting doctoral education. The underproduction of PhDs in both contexts is similar. However, the following questions arise: Is PhD study a luxury in the face of the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, crime and unemployment in the South African context? Are PhDs resolving post-apartheid societal communal problems, or is the PhD another means of self-enrichment?

The close-knit state and the higher education institutions relationships in teacher education provide the landscape for analysis of the recent Mauritian interest in PhD study. This aligning provides pragmatic interventions for achieving the educational goals to establish Mauritius as the knowledge hub of the Indian Ocean islands, to develop appropriate curricula and to produce teachers to service the schooling system. However, the PhD (unlike professional doctorates) infuses potentially a critical disruption of “comfortable collaborations”. So what is worth of a PhD in education?

This comparative paper suggests that the value of a PhD in developing world contexts has both enabling and constraining potential: to personal, institutional, social and nationalistic agendas. The agenda of the doctorate therefore needs to be brought into sharper focus.

Keywords: Doctoral career paths; the economic, national, personal and social values of PhD study

*Prof Michael Anthony Samuel, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*