



**Hampton, J. J. (2018). *The malaise of academic scholarship: Why it starts with the doctoral dissertation as a baptism of fire*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.**

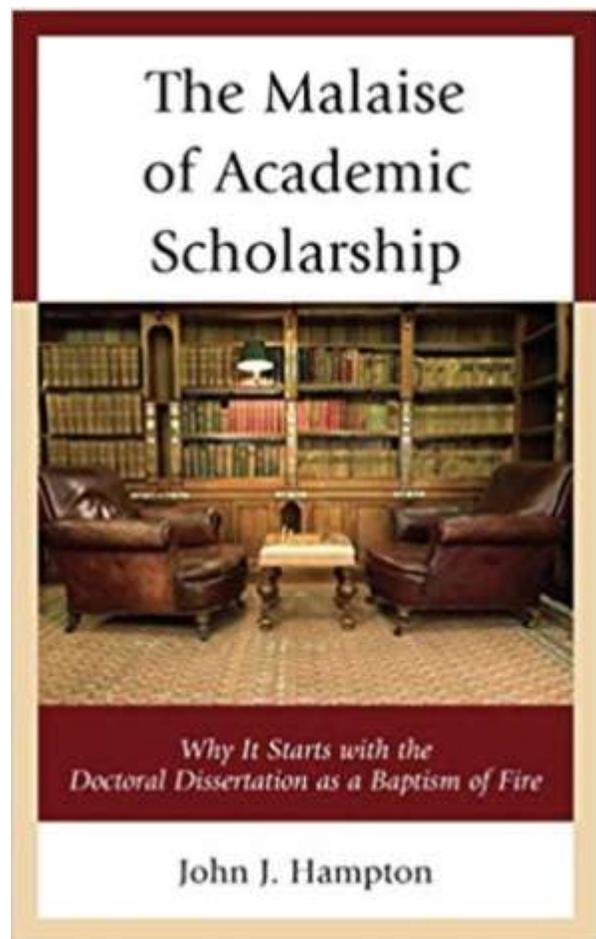
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Hampton's (2018) main argument in *The Malaise of Academic Scholarship* is that scholarly research and the quality of educational products are in decline. Hampton asserts that the deterioration of the scholarship begins with the doctoral dissertation process and continues after degree completion. According to Hampton, dissertations in the arts, social sciences, business, and education place excessive emphasis on what he calls obscure research. As a consequence, doctoral candidates as future professors may produce irrelevant scholarship to advance knowledge in their field and may provide poor training to undergraduate students. Hampton illustrates some of the salient features of the dissertation journey and presents what candidates should bear in mind when satisfying their final doctoral requirement.

The first part of the book incorporates Hampton's perception of the reality of scholarship today and its threats, which are producing the decline of the profession. The second section is dedicated to suggestions to



reform doctoral programs and the dissertation processes. Finally, the third section of the book is devoted mostly to offering practical advice to doctoral candidates to help them plan and write a dissertation. At the end of each of the 20 chapters, a brief summary is offered.

The author's style is short paragraphs with many subheadings and bulleted listings. His use of a question and answer format, fictional dialogues, and illustrative stories is very engaging. The language is colloquial, plain, and accessible for a primarily English-speaking audience. With the exception of a few notes throughout the book, no references or in-text citations are included. Ideas are presented concisely. However, often the text seems fragmented and disconnected, especially when transitioning from one chapter to the next. Indeed, the last chapter on the structure of the dissertation ends abruptly. The author frequently uses humor, which humanizes academic scholarship and doctoral studies, although the humor at times is glib and seems to trivialize issues that may be points of vulnerability or sensitivity to some readers.

The book targets doctoral students, and American students in particular. Recurring stories reference dominant American values, and contain remarks that are familiar to this group of readers. For example, hints to standardized test practice questions, domestic baseball players' statistics, and college fraternities lack contextualization or an explanation of details. As such, Hampton's anecdotes are inaccessible for diverse audiences living within the United States or for international doctoral students. Hampton thus operates under the assumption that doctoral students and candidates are a homogenous population, in contradistinction to the growing literature on the varied experiences of doctoral students both within the United States and around the world. The research, however, acknowledges the diversity of doctoral students'

background, previous academic paths, differences among disciplines, common pitfalls during the doctoral program, and corresponding support systems that facilitate success (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Golde, 2005; Holley & Gardner 2012; Jazvac-Martek, Chen, & McAlpine, 2011; Paliktzoglou & Suhonen, 2011). With the exception of identifying some of the procedural hardships such as challenges in communication with advisors, difficulty with narrowing down the topic of interest, or setting a realistic timeline, the more salient issues often represented in higher education research are mostly ignored in Hampton's work.

Ironically, the book centers on Hampton's opinions exclusively. It is not typically the case that one person's take is sufficient for scholarly merit in academic publications. His claims about scholarly research in the arts, social sciences, business, and education are imprecise and simply not substantiated by any scholarly sources or methods. Informed by the author's academic training and professional experience in business, as well as his experience as an administrator in higher education, the book represents merely preliminary explorations of the dissertation process.

Echoing the tone of its title, the book begins with a disturbing portrayal of inner operations of academia in the United States. Inequalities among institutions, increasing numbers of contingent faculty, and predatory research journals are some of the prominent issues the author identifies, as well as the drivers leading to the current crisis in scholarship (i.e., those conducting irrelevant research within the disciplines). This initial revelation contrasts to the remaining chapters presented with Hampton's seemingly playful voice. As such, those hoping that the author will expound on the possibilities that facilitate learning or explain the privileges doctoral training involves will be disappointed. Beyond the introduction,

Hampton maintains a superficial level, as he fails to explore other pertinent issues that prevent students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines from making progress at this critical stage of their academic trajectory.

The dissertation is identified as a requirement for graduation that demands a set of prescribed steps and decisions, such as setting realistic timelines, choosing the “right” director, and narrowing the research topic. Understanding variables, validity, and reliability are described as key to knowledge production. Hampton may limit the comprehension of a complex process by neglecting to acknowledge other substantive influences on students’ advancement in their doctoral program and completing their dissertation. Additionally, readers who do not espouse positivist views about knowledge making, data analysis, and the

research process, may be frustrated by how his uninterrogated perspective makes other approaches invisible.

Overall, this book grants access to Hampton’s partial views about not only the academy and the dissertation process but also what constitutes knowledge, the industry of scholarly journals, and the contribution of the arts, social science, business, and education fields to academic scholarship. Moreover, all the examples and references presented in the book are based on the U.S. higher education system and its dominant academic culture, without explicit mention of what is taking place internationally. As such, some may even argue that the epistemological biases of administrators like Hampton may have contributed to the decline in scholarship that Hampton himself laments.

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