Do you need a doctorate to become a professional? In a growing number of fields, especially in health areas, the answer is yes. For example, new U.S. audiologists and physical therapists who until recently just needed master’s degrees now must have doctorates to enter professional practice, and several other fields appear to be moving in this direction. As a result, doctoral enrollments in these areas have skyrocketed since 2000. However, critics have questioned the rationales for these new doctoral requirements and expectations. Moreover, the newly created doctoral degrees in these fields are neither research-oriented PhDs nor classical professional doctorates like the MD. Rather, they are a new type of “professional-practice doctorate” that is typically a extension of (rather than different in kind from) the master’s degrees they replace. This presentation, an expansion of my earlier work on professional doctorates, will discuss who and what are driving the creation and expansion of these new degrees, how they compare to older doctoral degrees, and their outcomes and implications — for access to professions, quality of client care, future doctoral requirements, and the meaning of a doctorate. This analysis utilizes case studies of three fields: audiology, nursing practice, and physical therapy.

Ami Zusman is a Research Associate at the Center for Studies in Higher Education at UC Berkeley. Her research at CSHE has been primarily focused on the emergence and expansion of new kinds of professional doctoral degrees (many in fields that had never had doctorates) and the implications of these new degrees for access to the professions, institutional missions and resources, and costs and benefits to clients and the public. Zusman previously served as Coordinator of Graduate Education Planning and Analysis for the University of California system, where she directed graduate and professional education planning and policy, as well as student outcomes assessment. She developed long-range graduate enrollment plans for the UC system, created instruments to measure and compare graduate student success, and was the lead UC liaison for the National Research Council’s assessment of doctoral programs, among other activities. She also authored or was principal staff for University-wide reports on interdisciplinary graduate education, self-supporting graduate programs at UC, and workforce projections for graduate degree recipients in different fields, among other matters. Zusman has published on various higher education topics, including the growth of professional practice doctorates, university-state conflict, teacher education, community college policy, and challenges facing higher education in the 21st century. Zusman received her Ph.D. in higher education policy from UC Berkeley.