

Transparency in Doctoral Policy Governance (Part II): Measuring Transparency Through Governance Metrics and Institutional Application

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Abstract

This article advances the measurement of transparency in doctoral policy governance by translating conceptual transparency frameworks into structured, evaluative institutional practices. Building on prior work establishing a Transparency Protocol for doctoral programs, this study introduces a metrics-based framework incorporating compliance indicators, governance benchmarks, and institutional application strategies. The article develops measurable constructs—including advance-notice compliance, policy version-control integrity, stakeholder-communication reach, and appeal-resolution timelines—to assess transparency practices across doctoral programs. Using modeled institutional applications and governance evaluation scenarios, the study demonstrates how universities can systematically measure adherence to transparency standards while identifying areas of procedural risk. The contribution is twofold: first, it provides a metrics-driven framework for assessing transparency in doctoral governance; second, it offers an implementation model that supports institutional alignment with accreditation expectations, legal considerations, and ethical standards. The findings suggest that transparency, when measured through defined indicators, functions as a critical mechanism for strengthening institutional accountability, procedural fairness, and academic integrity in doctoral education.

Keywords: doctoral governance; transparency measurement; compliance indicators; policy evaluation; academic integrity; institutional accountability

1. Introduction

The increasing complexity of doctoral education governance has created a need not only for transparent policy frameworks but also for mechanisms that allow institutions to measure and evaluate transparency in practice. While existing scholarship has emphasized the ethical and legal importance of transparency in doctoral policy changes, there remains a critical gap in developing structured approaches to assess whether transparency is consistently achieved within institutional governance systems (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005; Lovitts, 2001).

Universities frequently implement policy modifications to reflect evolving accreditation requirements, institutional priorities, and academic standards. However, the absence of measurable transparency mechanisms limits institutions' ability to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes and demonstrate compliance with governance expectations. Without defined metrics, transparency risks remaining an aspirational principle rather than an operational standard (McAlpine et al., 2020).

This article addresses this gap by introducing a measurement-oriented framework for transparency in doctoral policy governance. By defining specific metrics, compliance indicators, and evaluative approaches, the study provides institutions with the tools necessary to assess policy implementation practices systematically. The article further demonstrates how these measurement strategies can be applied within institutional contexts to strengthen accountability, reduce procedural disputes, and support equitable doctoral outcomes.

Furthermore, this study adopts a conceptual, document-based analytical approach, aligning transparency metrics with governance processes through higher education policy literature and institutional frameworks. The framework is conceptual and evaluative in nature, designed to support institutional assessment without reliance on human-subject data.

This article forms part of a two-part research series examining transparency in doctoral policy governance. Part I establishes the ethical, legal, and governance implications of undisclosed policy changes and introduces a structured Transparency Protocol. Part II extends this foundation by operationalizing transparency through measurable indicators, compliance metrics, and institutional evaluation models. Together, the series advances a comprehensive framework for understanding, implementing, and assessing transparency in the governance of doctoral education.

Framework Extension: From Transparency to Measurability

Prior scholarship on doctoral governance has established transparency as a critical component of ethical and effective policy implementation, particularly in relation to institutional accountability and stakeholder trust (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; Elliott et al., 2020). These studies emphasize the importance of clearly communicated expectations, structured program requirements, and consistent administrative practices in supporting doctoral student success.

However, while transparency has been well-established as a normative principle, less attention has been paid to how it can be evaluated in measurable terms. Without defined indicators, institutions lack the ability to determine whether policy communication practices meet acceptable standards or whether procedural deficiencies exist.

This article extends the conceptual foundation of transparency by introducing measurability as a core component of governance. Transparency is reframed not only as an ethical obligation but also as an evaluative construct that can be assessed through defined metrics and compliance

indicators. This shift enables institutions to move from principle-based governance toward evidence-based evaluation, supporting more consistent and defensible policy implementation practices (Virelli III & Podgor, 2019).

Transparency Measurement Framework

The measurement of transparency in doctoral governance requires identifying quantifiable indicators that reflect institutional adherence to policy communication, documentation, and procedural fairness standards. The proposed framework comprises six core dimensions: notification compliance, documentation integrity, communication effectiveness, appeal-resolution efficiency, procedural fairness, and policy compliance.

Each dimension is operationalized through measurable indicators that allow institutions to assess transparency practices systematically. For example, advance-notice compliance can be evaluated by examining the proportion of policy changes communicated within a defined timeframe. At the same time, documentation integrity can be assessed through the availability of version-controlled policy archives.

By establishing measurable transparency indicators, institutions can conduct internal audits, support accreditation reporting, and identify governance gaps before they result in procedural disputes or legal challenges. This metrics-based approach aligns with broader scholarship emphasizing the importance of structured governance practices and institutional accountability in higher education (Kaplin et al., 2019; McAlpine et al., 2020).

Building on the measurable indicators outlined in Table 1, the following model illustrates how transparency metrics are systematically integrated across the doctoral policy governance lifecycle, embedding evaluative mechanisms within institutional processes to support continuous assessment and accountability (Kaplin et al., 2019; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2025a).

Table 1

Transparency Measurement Indicators Across Doctoral Policy Governance Phases

Governance Phase	Transparency Indicator	Measurement Method	Data Source	Compliance Benchmark
Policy Proposal	Documentation completeness	Content analysis of proposal records	Internal policy drafts, committee records	≥ 95% required documentation present
	Stakeholder identification	Review of stakeholder mapping	Governance charters, meeting minutes	All affected stakeholders were identified
	Rationale clarity	Qualitative assessment of justification statements	Proposal narratives	Clear justification aligned with institutional mission
Review & Approval	Compliance assessment transparency	Audit of review criteria disclosure	Review board documentation	Public or internal access to the criteria
	Stakeholder participation rate	Quantitative participation tracking	Meeting attendance logs	≥ 80% stakeholder engagement
	Decision traceability	Process tracing of approval steps	Approval workflows, records	Full audit trail of decisions
Public Notification	Advance notice period	Time-based analysis (days prior to implementation)	Official communications	≥ 30 days advance notice
	Communication reach	Distribution analysis	Email logs, website analytics	≥ 90% affected population reached
	Accessibility of policy updates	Usability and access audit	Institutional websites, portals	Policies are publicly accessible without barriers
Implementation	Version control integrity	Document version comparison	Policy repositories	All revisions logged and timestamped
	Waiver/exception tracking	Exception log analysis	Administrative records	100% of waivers documented
	Implementation consistency	Cross-unit comparative analysis	Departmental reports	Minimal variance across units
Monitoring	Appeal resolution time	Time-to-resolution analysis	Appeals database	≤ 30 days average resolution
	Dispute frequency	Incident frequency tracking	Complaint/appeal logs	Declining or stable trend
	Feedback integration	Review of policy revisions based on feedback	Revision histories	Evidence of feedback incorporation
Audit & Evaluation	Policy adherence rate	Compliance audit scoring	Internal/external audits	≥ 95% adherence
	Governance audit frequency	Audit schedule review	Audit reports	Annual or biannual audits are conducted
	Continuous improvement evidence	Longitudinal policy comparison	Policy archives	Demonstrated iterative improvements

Note. Author created. The table presents a phase-aligned framework for assessing transparency in doctoral policy governance, integrating measurable indicators across policy proposal, review, and approval, public notification, implementation, monitoring, and audit stages. Indicators reflect institutional accountability mechanisms, procedural visibility, and benchmarks for stakeholder engagement. Adapted from governance and higher education policy literature (Kaplin et al., 2019; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2025a, 2025b).

Collectively, these indicators provide a replicable framework for evaluating institutional transparency, enabling comparative assessment across programs while identifying structural gaps that may expose institutions to governance deficiencies and legal risk (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024).

Institutional Applications and Evaluation Scenarios

The application of transparency measurement frameworks within institutional contexts provides a practical mechanism for evaluating governance effectiveness. Modeled scenarios illustrate how measurement indicators can be used to identify both strengths and deficiencies in policy implementation practices.

To demonstrate the practical applicability of the transparency measurement framework, Table 2 provides an illustrative institutional case example, highlighting how deficiencies in transparency practices manifest across governance phases and contribute to measurable compliance and legal risks (Kaplin et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2025a).

Table 2

Illustrative Institutional Application of Transparency Measurement Framework in Doctoral Policy Governance

Governance Phase	Observed Practice (Case Illustration)	Transparency Assessment	Identified Gap	Risk Implication
Policy Proposal	Policy revisions initiated without formal stakeholder mapping	Low	Stakeholders not formally identified or documented	Increased risk of procedural unfairness and exclusion claims
	Limited documentation supporting the rationale for the policy change	Low	Insufficient justification transparency	Weak defensibility in academic or legal challenges
Review & Approval	Policy reviewed by the internal committee without documented criteria	Moderate	Lack of publicly available evaluation standards	Perceived arbitrariness in decision-making
	Minimal stakeholder participation in review meetings	Low	Inadequate stakeholder engagement	Governance legitimacy concerns
Public Notification	Policy changes communicated via limited email distribution	Moderate	Incomplete communication reach	Students or faculty may not receive critical updates
	Notice provided less than 14 days before implementation	Low	Insufficient advance notice period	Potential due process violations
Implementation	Policy implemented without a version tracking system	Low	No formal version control mechanism	Inability to verify policy evolution
	Exceptions granted without centralized documentation	Low	Waiver tracking is not standardized	Inconsistent application of policy
Monitoring	Appeals are processed inconsistently across departments	Moderate	Lack of standardized resolution timelines	Unequal treatment across units
	Increase in dispute frequency following policy implementation	Low	Feedback is not systematically analyzed	Early warning indicators ignored
Audit & Evaluation	No formal audit was conducted post-implementation	Low	Absence of a governance audit cycle	Undetected compliance failures
	No evidence of iterative policy improvement	Low	Lack of a continuous improvement framework	Institutional stagnation and recurring issues

Note. Author created. The table presents a generalized institutional case illustration demonstrating how gaps in transparency across doctoral policy governance phases may produce measurable compliance deficiencies and associated legal or procedural risks. The case is illustrative and synthesized from governance and higher education policy literature rather than derived from a single institution (Kaplin et al., 2019; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019).

This illustrative application underscores the critical role of transparency as a governance mechanism, revealing how deficiencies at any stage of the policy lifecycle may cascade into systemic risk, thereby reinforcing the necessity of structured transparency metrics and continuous institutional oversight (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024).

In a low-transparency scenario, a doctoral program implements policy changes without sufficient advance notice or updated documentation. Measurement indicators would reveal deficiencies across multiple dimensions, including notification compliance, documentation integrity, and communication effectiveness. These deficiencies may contribute to increased procedural disputes and governance risk exposure, reduced stakeholder trust, and potential challenges to institutional credibility (Cohen & Baruch, 2022).

Conversely, a high-transparency scenario involves implementing structured communication practices, including advance-notice periods, version-controlled documentation, and clearly defined appeal mechanisms. Measurement indicators in this scenario would demonstrate strong compliance across all dimensions, reflecting improved stakeholder awareness, reduced dispute frequency, and enhanced procedural fairness (Elliott et al., 2020).

These scenarios demonstrate that transparency measurement is not merely an evaluative exercise but a practical governance tool that enables institutions to diagnose weaknesses and implement targeted improvements.

Governance Measurement and Implementation Model

The integration of transparency measurement into doctoral governance requires a structured implementation model that aligns policy development with continuous evaluation. This model consists of six phases: policy proposal, institutional review, stakeholder notification, implementation, monitoring, and audit.

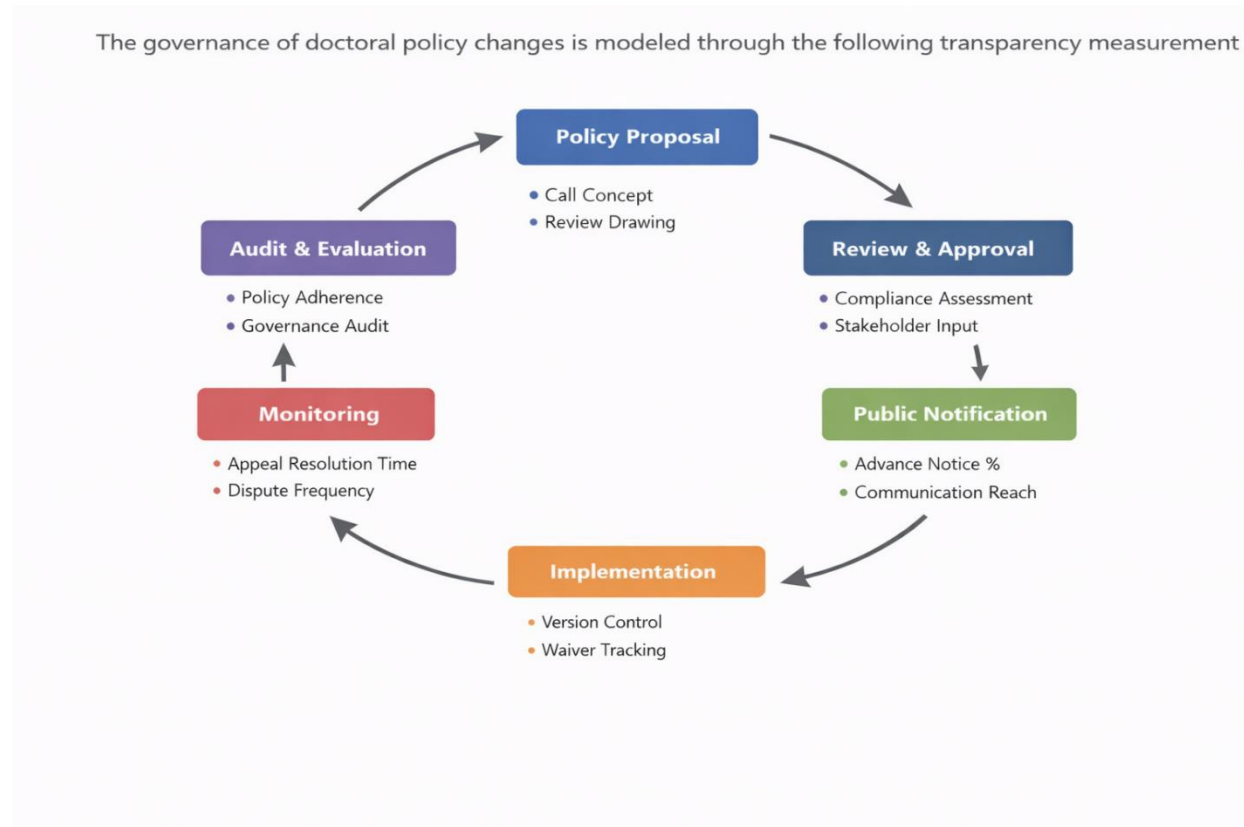
Measurement is embedded within each phase of the governance lifecycle. During the notification phase, institutions assess compliance with advance-notice requirements and the reach of stakeholder communication. During implementation, documentation practices and policy accessibility are evaluated. Monitoring phases focus on key indicators such as appeal resolution timelines, waiver utilization, and dispute frequency.

The audit phase provides a comprehensive evaluation of transparency performance across all dimensions, enabling institutions to identify areas for improvement and implement corrective actions. This lifecycle approach reflects broader governance principles emphasizing accountability and procedural consistency in higher education (Kaplin et al., 2019).

Figure 1 presents the Transparency Measurement Governance Model, illustrating how transparency metrics are embedded across each phase of the doctoral policy lifecycle to support continuous evaluation and institutional accountability (Kaplin et al., 2019; McAlpine et al., 2020).

Figure 1

Transparency Measurement Governance Model



Note. Author created. The model illustrates the lifecycle of doctoral policy governance, including policy proposal, institutional review, stakeholder notification, implementation, monitoring, and audit. Each phase incorporates measurable transparency indicators, such as advance-notice compliance, communication reach, documentation integrity, appeal-resolution timelines, and dispute frequency. The integration of these indicators enables continuous evaluation of institutional transparency and supports procedural fairness and accountability in doctoral education (Kaplin et al., 2019; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019).

As illustrated in Figure 1, embedding measurable transparency indicators throughout the governance lifecycle enables institutions to move from reactive policy management toward proactive, evidence-based oversight, thereby strengthening procedural fairness, reducing dispute risk, and reinforcing institutional trust (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; Elliott et al., 2020).

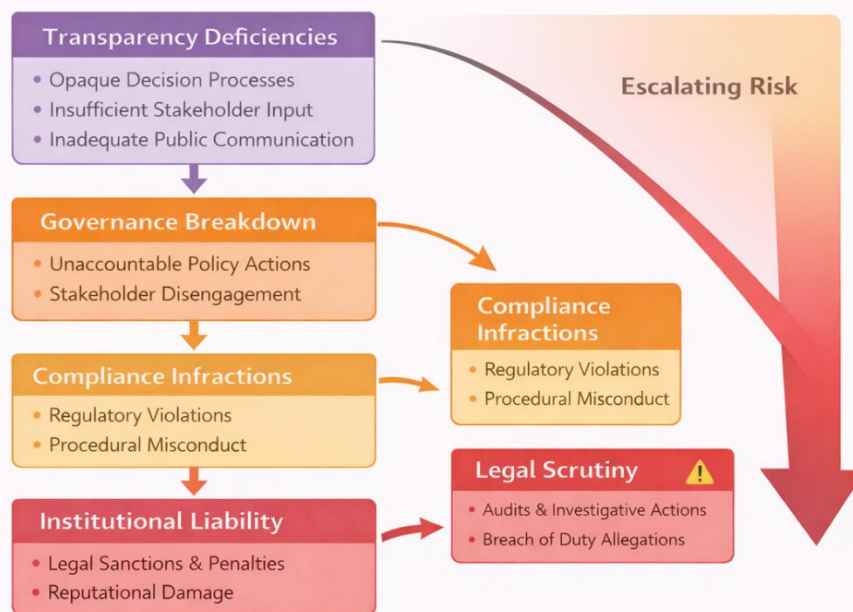
Policy and Institutional Implications

The measurement of transparency in doctoral governance has significant implications for institutional policy development, accreditation compliance, and legal defensibility. By adopting measurable transparency indicators, universities can provide documented evidence of policy communication practices, thereby strengthening their ability to demonstrate procedural fairness and accountability. While transparency measurement enables institutions to evaluate governance performance, it is equally critical to understand how transparency deficiencies escalate into broader institutional and legal risks.

To further operationalize the governance implications of transparency deficiencies, Figure 2 presents a risk-cascade model illustrating the progressive escalation from procedural gaps to governance breakdowns, compliance infractions, and institutional liability (Kaplin et al., 2019; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019).

Figure 2

Risk-Cascade Model: From Transparency Deficiencies to Institutional Liability



Note. Author created. The figure illustrates the sequential escalation of risk arising from deficiencies in transparency in doctoral policy governance. The cascade begins with transparency failures, including inadequate communication, insufficient documentation, and a lack of stakeholder engagement, and progresses through governance breakdown, compliance infractions, and increased legal scrutiny, ultimately culminating in institutional liability. The model emphasizes the interconnected nature of governance processes and the compounding effect of unresolved transparency deficiencies (Kaplin et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2025a; Virelli III & Podgor, 2019).

As illustrated in Figure 2, the absence of measurable transparency mechanisms creates compounding vulnerabilities within doctoral governance systems, reinforcing the need for structured metrics and continuous oversight to mitigate institutional risk and ensure procedural fairness (Cohen & Baruch, 2022; McAlpine et al., 2020).

From an accreditation perspective, transparency metrics offer a structured approach for evaluating institutional adherence to standards related to student support, program integrity, and governance accountability (McAlpine et al., 2020). From a legal standpoint, measurable

indicators provide institutions with defensible documentation that may mitigate risks associated with undisclosed or retroactive policy changes (Kaplin et al., 2019).

Moreover, the use of transparency metrics supports institutional decision-making by providing data-driven insights into governance performance. This approach enables universities to refine policy implementation strategies, enhance stakeholder trust, and improve doctoral program outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is conceptual and does not include empirical validation using institutional datasets. While the proposed measurement framework provides a structured approach to evaluating transparency, future research is needed to empirically test it across diverse institutional contexts. Future studies may explore the relationship between transparency indicators and doctoral outcomes, including completion rates, time-to-degree, and stakeholder perceptions of institutional trust (Gardner, 2009; Golde, 2005). Quantitative analyses examining these relationships would further strengthen the empirical foundation of measurement-based governance models.

Conclusion

The ability to measure transparency in doctoral policy governance represents a critical advancement in aligning institutional practices with principles of accountability, fairness, and academic integrity. While transparency has traditionally been treated as a normative expectation, this article demonstrates that it can and should be evaluated through structured metrics and compliance indicators.

By establishing a measurement-based framework and implementation model, this study offers institutions practical tools to evaluate and enhance their governance practices. Transparency, when operationalized through quantifiable indicators, functions as both an ethical obligation and a strategic governance instrument, providing a robust framework for institutional governance within increasingly regulated academic settings and supporting doctoral success.

Institutions that adopt measurement-based transparency practices will be better positioned to demonstrate accountability, maintain stakeholder trust, and support the integrity, defensibility, and accountability of doctoral programs.

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