THE GENESIS AND FUTURE OF THE ABSEL "CLASSICOS" INITIATIVE

Hugh M. Cannon
Wayne State University
hugh.cannon@wayne.edu

J. Alexander Smith
Wayne State University
ae4651@wayne.edu

ABSTRACT

Over the years, ABSEL has struggled with its research mission, trying to find its unique niche among professional organizations. This paper reviews the literature on this topic, identifying key issues and proposals. It then discusses the role of the Bernie Keys Library and the subsequent "Classicos" initiative in addressing ABSEL's research strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since its genesis as an organization, ABSEL has been prone to introspection. Indeed, to summarize the literature is a daunting task. Searching for articles that refer to ABSEL in the Bernie Keys Library (BKL), we get 410 out of 1,877 papers. Of course, not all of these are truly introspective in nature. That is, they do not necessarily seek to address who or what ABSEL is and ought to be. But many do, as suggested by the titles illustrated in Exhibit 1.

This paper continues the tradition. Its original purpose to develop a list of "target" journals from which we might draw invited articles for the BKL. This, in turn, grew out of the efforts of the ABSEL "Classicos" task force, which, under the direction of Joe Wolfe, has been tasked with making the BKL a richer source of research for ABSEL members.

In developing the paper, we found that the specific task took on more meaning when cast in an historical and strategic context, drawing on some of the work found in the "introspective" papers. We will draw on these papers to develop a framework for understanding the "Classicos" initiative. We will then proceed with the task of identifying strategic publication outlets, focusing, however, more on strategy than the identification of specific journals or articles.

AN HISTORICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

As one might expect, the various "introspective" articles range widely in the type and level of problems they address. A number of them seek to identify the essence of ABSEL through the kind of research it does. For instance, Burns and Banasiewisc (1994) used multi-dimensional scaling of ABSEL cross references to develop an analysis of "schools of thought," a task that was tackled again by Faria and Wolfe (1999) and Faria (2000), using content analysis. In a similar vein, Burns (1999) uses his own work as a barometer of ABSEL interests, characterizing the streams of research he has pursued during the years ABSEL has existed as an organization. Butler, Markulus, and Strang (1985) analyzed ABSEL papers according to the type of educational objectives they addressed. Howard and Strang (2001) did key word searches of the BKL to determine the type of research ABSELers have contributed over the years.

Others papers have sought to address the motivations for ABSEL membership. These relate to research, since research is one of the reasons ABSELers get together (Anderson and Lawton 2000). Markulus, Ricci, and Strang (1989) infer research motivations from conference participation patterns, identifying "one-timers," "regulars," and the "inspired." However, an even stronger motivation than research seems to be social, relating to the "ABSEL style" of collegiality, informality, and willingness to discussion interesting pedagogically related topics (Gentry and Wolfe 1981). Patz and Morgan (1994) suggest that collegial motivation and research might be at odds with each other, where desires to preserve the "ABSEL style" might cause ABSELers to resist the measures necessary to increase the quality of their research.

Exhibit 1: Sample Titles Resulting from a Search on "ABSEL" in the BKL

Search Results — Score Title — Found 410 out of 1883 documents.

- A CRITICAL REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF ABSEL'S AWARD-WINNING PROCEDURES AND PROTOCOLS
- A PROFILE OF ABSEL CONFERENCE ATTENDEES
- ABSEL - AT A CROSSROADS?
- ABSEL's Historical Research Interests
- ABSEL: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION
- ABSEL: THE WAY WE TALK!
- ABSEL: THE WAY WE WERE AND NEED TO BE
- AN ANALYSIS OF ABSEL CONFERENCE PAPERS (1974-1985)
- BACK FROM THE FUTURE: AN ABSEL "MERLIN" EXERCISE FOR THE YEAR 2005
- LEARNING THEORY AND RESEARCH DESIGN: HOW HAS ABSEL FARED?
- REVIEW OF SALIENT TRENDS IN PROCEEDINGS' CHARACTERISTICS: A FIFTEEN YEAR PROFILE OF ABSEL
- SIMULATION/EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AUDIT
- THE ABSEL ENDNOTE DATABASE: THE PERFECT TOOL FOR THE BERNIE KEYS LIBRARY
- THE INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF ABSEL: A Bibliometeic STUDY OF AUTHOR COCITATIONS OVER TIME
- ABSEL MEGATREND ROOTS
- AN ANALYSIS OF ABSEL: ITS PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS
- SIMULATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AS HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH
- THE ABSEL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM: PRELIMINARY STEPS AND POSITION PAPERS
- THE ABSEL RESEARCH HERITAGE AND THE BKL: LEVERAGING THEIR VALUE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
- THE CREATION AND OPERATION OF A DATA-BASE SYSTEM FOR ABSEL RESEARCH
- A REVIEW OF MY ABSEL-RELATED WORK
- ABSEL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING/EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE: THE DECADE OF THE 1970S
- LIFELONG LEARNING AND ABSEL: AN INQUIRY DEFINITION AND RELATIONSHIPS
- MEGATRENDS" FOR BUSINESS SIMULATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
- OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE: ABSEL'S ROLE
- THE CHANGING NATURE OF SIMULATION RESEARCH: A BRIEF ABSEL HISTORY
- 2001 INTERNATIONAL COLLEGIATE BUSINESS STRATEGY COMPETITION: 37 YEARS OF COLLEGIATE COMPETITION
- ABSEL AS HOME COMMUNITY: AN INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION
- CHALKBOARDS TO CHIPBOARDS FOR TEACHERS AND CONSULTANTS
- DRAFT STANDARDS AND REGISTRATION PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS
- ORGANIZATIONS ADVANCING BUSINESS SIMULATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
- THE RELATIVE VALUE OF THE NATIONAL ABSEL MEETING: AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS BY FACULTY AND DEANS

At an even higher level, some papers have sought to address ABSEL as an organization, its rationale and strategic imperatives. For instance, Whatley and Hoffman (1984) see ABSEL as a research-based association and suggest that it must develop programmatic research to stimulate a stronger base of theory. Wolfe (1986) proposed a research consortium to address the problems, noting that ABSEL research was "…limited, non-cumulative and counterproductive [based on] discursive and often unsound methodological approaches, unique applications and small sample sizes, poor instrumentation, and ill-defined criteria" (p. 1). More than ten years later, Kelley and Brice (1999) and Gentry, Commuri, Burns, and Dickinson (1998) echo these same concerns. Gentry, et. al. note that ABSEL has "… not generated processes that will yield valid measures of the amount of learning that has taken place" (p. 66). They

go on to suggest that ABSEL must push forward, building on past research rather than "reinventing the wheel."

Patz and Morgan (1994) cast the research problem in reference to the larger ABSEL strategy. They note that the laid back "ABSEL style" has fostered laid-back, low-quality research. Without accepting or rejecting the connection between "ABSEL style" and research quality, their concerns certainly cut to the heart of ABSEL's survivability. Burton (1987) surveyed Deans regarding the value of professional meetings, and found that ABSEL ranked close to the bottom of the list. This is significant, because Dean's are ultimately the ones who fund ABSEL conference travel, in most cases. Kelley and Brice (1999) cite a similar lack of respect for ABSEL research, tying it back to a lack of theoretical rigor.

In response to their criticism, Patz and Morgan (1994) suggest that ABSEL might pursue three alternative courses of action to address the quality of ABSEL research:

1. *Exploration*. ABSEL would become an organization that leads in the exploration of innovative ideas in the regarding the teaching of business disciplines. Members would then take their ideas, polish them, and publish them in established pedagogical journals, such as *Journal of Management Education* or *Simulation and Gaming*.
2. *Respectability*. ABSEL would increase the quality of its research and eventually start its own quality journal.
3. *Activism*. ABSEL would be a "cross-over" organization between academe and industry, where members would be active in both worlds, co-presenting with practitioners, and publishing in journals such as *Harvard Business Review*, *Academy of Management Executive*, and *California Management Review*.

At present, ABSEL appears to be closest to the *exploration* scenario. Many successful ABSEL papers go on to publication in journals, most notably, *Simulation and Gaming*. However, there has been an on-going undercurrent of unrest in ABSEL, militating for control over our own research destiny, such as would be served by the *respectability* scenario. This is reflected in nostalgic comments regarding the quality of ABSEL's short-lived *Journal of Experiential Learning and Simulation* (e.g. Kelley and Brice 1999). There has been a great deal of unpublished discussion among ABSEL Board members regarding the advisability of starting a new journal.

INTERNAL RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Publication strategy is understandably important, because refereed publications are the currency of academic promotion and tenure. However, over the years, ABSEL has sought to address the research quality issue directly. Indeed the very existence of ABSEL was stimulated by the need to gather people together who were interested in improving our understanding of business simulations and experiential learning. We have noted Whatley and Hoffman's (1984) call for programmatic research and Wolfe's (1986) call for an ABSEL research consortium. In 1986, Burns proposed an ABSEL database to simulate better research.

Many of the requirements of Burns' (1986) research database were addressed in 2000, with the advent of the Bernie Keys Library. The BKL contains a word-searchable compendium of all ABSEL proceedings from the beginning of the organization and a copy of Jim Gentry's (1990), *Guide to Business Gaming and Experiential Learning,* available to every member on CD ROM as part of their membership fees. Since the advent of the BKL, we have

begun to see research studies using its resources (e.g. Howard and Strang 2001), as well as papers suggesting ways that it might be utilized more fully (e.g. Platt and Peach 2001, Peach and Platt 2002).

The ABSEL "Classicos" task force grew out of this movement. Under the direction of Joe Wolfe, members of the task force have sought to find additional resources that would be useful to ABSEL members, including classic articles or monographs that have not been published earlier in the ABSEL proceedings. The initiative seeks to address two major failings of conventional journal publishing. First, journals are expensive and diffused across many different publishing companies. While many academics have access to large-scale online databases, no one has access to all of them. And the cost of obtaining access is continually rising. The effect, then, is to make conventional publishing a highly inefficient way to disseminate knowledge. Second, the process of review used by journals to increase publication quality is also inefficient. While it improves quality on the whole, it is notoriously unreliable and consumes so much time and energy that many good papers never find their way through the system.

None of this is to discount the practical importance of conventional publishing. ABSEL maintains a policy of allowing free publications of its materials in other sources. However, the problems of modern publishing make the notion of an increasingly comprehensive compendium of research such as the BKL increasingly interesting. While it includes research of highly varying quality, the papers are easy to access, and easy to screen for relevance and quality. Furthermore, the accumulated body of research tends to exclude those papers of less interest, referring more frequently to those that appear to be of the most significance. At some point, it may supercede conventional journals by virtue of its greater usefulness and increased usage.

Perhaps most important of all, the BKL, along with its proposed "Classicos" enhancements, addresses the potential conflict between laid-back "ABSEL style" and high quality research. It provides an extremely convenient and universally available tool for helping ABSEL members study the topics that led them to ABSEL in the first place. The effect of this is portrayed in Exhibit 2. The ready availability of relevant materials simultaneously feeds the intrinsic interests of members while decreasing the time and energy required to access these materials, thus increasing research motivation. The relevant materials consist of the content of the BKL, which, in turn, we are seeking to enhance through the "Classicos" initiative.

Exhibit 2: A Model for Increasing Research Quality through Relevance and Convenience
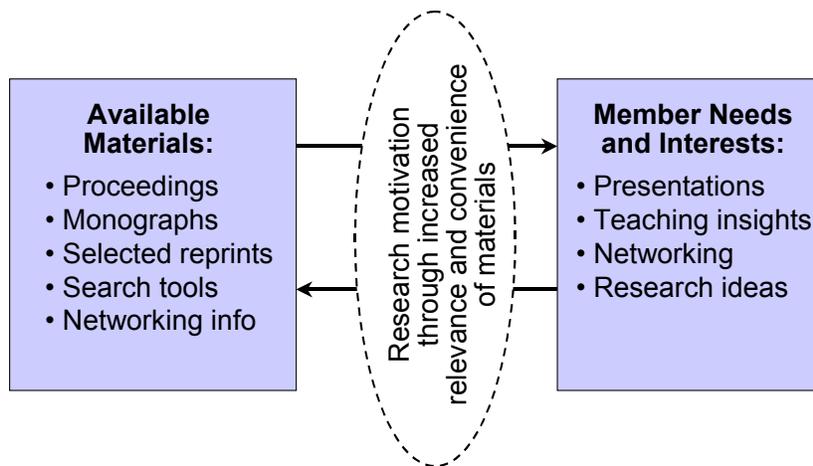
The "available materials" box of Exhibit 2 represents the kinds of materials contained in the BKL. The "member needs and interests" comes from on-going research regarding what ABSEL members want. The specific items mentioned in the exhibit come from Anderson and Lawton's (2000, p. 261) research regarding member interests, as summarized in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: Why Members Attend ABSEL Conferences

"Active" Involvement			"Passive" Involvement		
Present a paper	37	61.7%	Learn new teaching processes	40	66.7%
Present an experiential exercise	7	11.7%	Network with colleagues	40	66.7%
Lead a panel discussion	6	10.0%	Learn new pedagogical research ideas	33	55.0%
Present a simulation	4	6.7%	Network with others interested in simulations and gaming	33	55.0%
Direct a workshop	4	6.7%	Network with others interested in experiential exercises	28	46.7%
			Learn new research ideas	26	43.3%

Anderson and Lawton's research suggests an interesting paradox. Its essence is captured in Exhibit 4 (Anderson and Lawton 2000, p. 262), which shows the actual activities that members want most at conferences (as opposed to why they attend). Most people go to the conference to present a paper, and yet only 15% appear to like attending paper presentations! There is a further inconsistency in the fact that some of the best information regarding new teaching processes, pedagogical research ideas, and other research ideas, all of which hold major interest for our conferences. One explanation is that ABSELers are caught between two worlds: In one, they go to conferences to present papers.

That is what they are taught to do, and perhaps more important, that is what their universities expect them to do. In the other world, they buy into the underlying premise of ABSEL, that people learn best by practical application and interaction. Presumably, they enjoy learning new teaching processes and research ideas, not by hearing them presented, but by discussing them with their colleagues. Similarly, this discussion presumably facilitates the kind of networking they seek, both personally, and as a source of new research alliances. This is not the only possible interpretation of this data, but it is certainly a plausible one, and one that lends itself to future verification.

Exhibit 4: What Members Want from in Future Conferences

• Simulation presentations	29	48.3%
• Workshops	26	43.3
• Experiential exercise presentations	20	33.3
• Panel discussions	14	23.3
• Paper presentations	9	15.0
n =	60	

If our interpretation is correct, the implications are profound. We can resolve the "paper presentation" paradox by limited the actual presentation of papers to a very brief summary or dedicating the remaining portion of our sessions to discussion. To address the need for both academic credit and in-depth reference, we simply include the papers in the BKL, where they are in a format that is much easier to absorb anyway!

RELEVANCE AND THE FUTURE OF ABSEL

The big unanswered question is not so much what to do at the conferences, or even in the BKL, but rather, what kinds of material to include. Once again, this is where the "Classicos" initiative becomes involved. To address the question, we have a host of introspective papers to draw upon. We have referred to the general "schools of thought" approach (Burns and Banasiewisz 1994; Faria and Wolfe 1999; Faria 2000). We have also addressed the various attempts to identify key topics (e.g. Howard and Strang 2001). Goosen (1986) distinguished between "simulation," "experiential learning," and "General Pedagogy," suggesting that "simulation" has become increasingly dominant as the years have passed. However, examining data from the 1990s, Butler's (1999) results would suggest that, while "simulation" papers are more numerous than "experiential learning," the margin is small, and there does not appear to be any obvious trend.

To our minds, the simulation/experiential distinction is not a particularly relevant distinction. A better way to get at ABSEL's identity would be to look for the commonalties that drew the two topics together in the first place – a kind of ABSEL DNA, as it were. The synthesis seems to be reflected in two concepts: First is a passion for pedagogy. ABSEL is interested in anything that will make teaching Business more effective. This is reflected in virtually every paper we reviewed, almost all of which referred to pedagogy as a central ABSELian focus. The second is the philosophical position that *active learning* is more effective than *passive learning*.

By active learning, we mean learning where the student takes a strong role in guiding the educational experience (Szczerbacki, Duserick, Rummel, Howard and Viggiani 2000) – what Patz, Keys, and Cannon (1999) refer to as *student-centered learning*. Many people use the terms *active learning* and *experiential learning* synonymously. However,

we view *experiential learning* as a sub-category of *active learning*, where students learn by doing, and in the context of Business education, through a kind of simulated experience (Gentry 1990). Reading a book can be *active learning*, as long as the student is directing the effort, rather than passively responding to an external requirement. *Experiential learning* would come from imagining oneself as a character in the book. Hoover (1974) argues that *experiential learning* is the more intense of the two types of learning. However, both share an integration of cognitive and affective learning, which, as a rule, is not true of conventional education, where most of the learning is cognitive (Gentry 1990).

Active, and especially *experiential*, learning is a key component of ABSELian DNA. This is evident in many of the studies we reviewed, but perhaps most obvious from a study by Butler, Markulis, and Strang (1985), in which they analyzed ABSEL papers according to the educational domain(s) they addressed (cognitive, affective or psychomotor). Of those studies that addressed domains, those addressing both the cognitive and affective were almost as common as those addressing the cognitive only. Those addressing either the affective or both cognitive and affective were slightly more prevalent than those addressing only the cognitive.

While such a strong showing for studies involving the affective domain is dramatic for research on university-level education, the fact that the cognitive domain showed up as strongly as it did also speaks to the centrality of broader educational pedagogical concepts in ABSELian research, regardless of their nature. In the end, ABSEL appears to be an organization that seeks to improve the quality of education in any way that works.

This is an important conclusion when we consider a recent unpublished proposal by ABSEL's "Domain" committee that recommended a focus on online learning. This is consistent with one of the four themes Burns (1999) emphasized in his ABSEL research. It is consistent with Schreirer's (1984, 1989) proposal that ABSEL look for ways to address the continuing educational needs that cope with social trends in an information-based society, and Kline's (1986) proposal that ABSEL address AACSB and AMA continuing education initiatives. It is also very much in line with Fritzsche and Cotter's (1992) advocacy of implementing simulation games in a networking environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ABSEL "CLASSICOS" INITIATIVE

This takes us to the actual impetus of our study, now almost a sidelight to our discussion of the larger analysis of ABSEL's research environment. Where should we look for papers to include in the BKL? One of the obvious answers is to look at the studies ABSELers most often quote. Exhibit 5 addresses specific articles or books that have been cited ten or more times by a sample of the leading ABSEL authors, taken from a database developed by Burns and his colleagues for an earlier study (Burns and Banasiewisz 1994).

Exhibit 5: Articles and Books Cited Ten or More Times by Leading ABSEL Authors

Article Name	Citations
The teaching effectiveness of games in collegiate business courses	43
The Business Management Laboratory	37
Small Group Behavior	27
A review of learning research in business gaming	25
Taxonomy of Educational Objectives	22
The Executive Game	22
A Study of the Educational Value of Management Games	21
A Dynamic Marketing Simulation	18
Individual Learning Styles and the Learning Process	17
DECIDE	17
The teaching effectiveness of games in collegiate business courses	16
The Multinational Management Game	16
Manual: A Guide to the Development and use of the Myers-Briggs type Indicator	15
The Effects of Game Complexity on the Acquisition of Business Policy Knowledge	14
Business games have failed	13
Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals	13
A comparative evaluation of the management of learning grids applied to Business Policy learning environments	13
What is experiential learning	12
Tempomatic IV: A Management Simulation	12
Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement	11
Business Games Handbook	10
Group Decision Making in a Computer Game: Analysis of Demographic and Psychosocial Variables	10
LAPTOP: A Marketing Simulation	10
Student perceptions of skill acquisition through cases and a general management simulation	10
Micromatic: A Management Simulation	10
The Case Approach vs. Gaming in the Teaching of Business Policy: An Experimental Evaluation	10
Personality bias in total enterprise simulations	10

If nothing else, the list provides an interesting picture of the kinds of articles ABSELers have drawn upon for their research. The prominence of actual games bespeaks the interest in analyzing games as a basis for research. However, the absence of more theoretical works highlights the comments cited earlier regarding ABSEL's failure to develop a meaningful theoretical underpinning for its discipline (Whatley and Hoffman 1984; Gentry, Commuri, Burns, and Dickinson 1998; Kelly and Brice 1999). While some of these works will hopefully find their way to the BKL, the list itself should change as the BKL begins to find broader usage in our research.

Exhibit 6: The Most Common Sources of ABSEL Citations

Source Name	Citations
ABSEL Proceedings	*1215*
Simulations & Gaming	*567*
Academy of Management	*369*
Decision Sciences	*102*
Management Science	*98*
Journal of Marketing	*85*
Journal of Applied Psychology	*83*
Journal of Business	*83*
Journal of Experiential Learning and Simulation	*71*
Guide to Business Gaming and Experiential Learning	*62*
Harvard Business Review	*59*
Journal of Management	*58*
Journal of Personality	*56*
Administrative Science Quarterly	*49*
NY: The Free Press	*38*
Human Relations	*37*
Taxonomy of Educational Objectives	*36*
Marketing Research	*33*
American Behavioral Scientist	*32*
Training and Development Journal	*32*
Journal of Educational Psychology	*31*
Psychology Reports	*30*
Strategic Management Journal	*30*
Small Group Behavior	*29*
American Marketing Association	*28*
Journal of Social Psychology	*28*
Organizational Behavior and Human Performance	*26*
The Executive Game	*24*
Consulting Psychologists Press	*23*
Wall Street Journal	*23*
Psychological Bulletin	*22*
American Psychology	*20*
Business Week	*20*
The Multinational Game	*20*

If the articles listed in Exhibit 5 are not the end-all source for possible additions to the BKL, then where else should we look? Exhibit 6 addresses this question by listing the publications from which ABSEL citations are taken, including those that have been referenced 20 or more times. These represent a much larger number of journals and publications. Considering the larger number, they appear to fall into four major categories:

1. *Simulation and Experiential Learning.* These include 1,915 different references and a host of journals, such as the ones indicated above (e.g. ABSEL Proceedings, *Simulation & Gaming, Journal of Experiential Learning and Simulation, Guide to Business Gaming and Experiential Learning*).

2. *Disciplinary Journals.* These include 858 references to articles in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal* and *Journal of Marketing*, where ABSELers have drawn on disciplinary concepts as a basis for applying ABSEL principles to teaching problems within their own discipline.

3. *Educational Theory.* These include 459 references to articles in publications that address the theoretical basis for ABSEL pedagogy. Note that several of these are psychology journals, such as *Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Personality*, and *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Not surprisingly, the list also includes Bloom's classic taxonomy of educational objectives.

4. *Operations Research/Modeling.* These include 200 references to articles in journals such as *Decision Sciences* and *Management Science*. These are journals from which ABSELers would logically draw from for

mathematical representations of the phenomena they are modeling.

This list has many implications pertaining to the quality and direction of ABSEL research. Though the primary purpose of this list is to guide us in finding new resources for the BKL, it might also have the added benefit of guiding ABSEL researchers to better sources of theory and other relevant background material. In the end, our purpose is to address the needs portrayed in Exhibit 2, by creating resources to help ABSELers do better research while having more fun doing it.

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