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A DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM: PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CONFERENCE BEHAVIOR

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Doctoral education has not received much coverage at ABSEL. There are a large number of experiential processes that take place during a doctoral student's career. For many, they learn to teach for the first time, frequently using a modeling process to structure their first courses and then truly using a trial-and-error approach in terms of finding what seems to work. They also learn the research process, again frequently by modeling the experienced researchers to whom they are assigned or with whom they choose to work. For most, the dissertation is the first extensive research study which they conduct and, despite the well-intentioned and nearly omniscient supervision of the dissertation committee, this process invariably involves much trial and error. This paper will look at another facet of academic life, that of the academic conference.

THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC CONFERENCES

The academic conference is a somewhat curious beast to describe to non-academics. Some describe it as an opportunity to present early results and to get cogent feedback in order to turn the paper into a major article. A more practical goal is that of attending in order to see what is current in the field and to stimulate new avenues for one's future research. In our experience, ABSEL has served this purpose well. A third goal is that of networking, making contacts and friends possibly with the supplemental benefits of establishing new research opportunities, of helping in future job searches (placement for oneself, one's colleagues, or one's students), and of helping in the recruitment of new colleagues.

Given that conferences are expensive activities and that most schools are faced with tight travel budgets, rarely is there money available to send students to national conferences. Given the pittance which doctoral students are paid, most cannot afford to attend conferences on their own unless the conferences are very close in proximity. The Marketing Department at the University of Nebraska has been somewhat unique over the years in that it has subsidized the travel expenses of doctoral students to national conferences, primarily the American Marketing Association conference. This travel policy has been costly and its feasibility in tough economic times has been called into question. One solution was to bring the mountain to Mohammed, so to speak, by hosting a Marketing Doctoral Symposium, modeled after the Haring Symposium held annually at Indiana University.

THE STRUCTURE OF A DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM

The format for the Symposium was to invite two doctoral students and at least one faculty member from each of the participating schools. Doctoral students and faculty from Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Oklahoma State attended, as well as three faculty from Iowa State (which does not have a doctoral program).

The Symposium started on a Thursday evening with a cocktail party at a faculty home. The first full day (Friday) of the Symposium saw thirty-minute presentations of dissertation research by one doctoral student from each school, followed by a ten to fifteen minute discussion by a second doctoral student from each school, followed by general discussion from the audience. For many of the students, this was their first time speaking in a conference setting. At the end of the day, there was a banquet to celebrate the day's activities. Saturday morning's activities consisted of discussions led by panels of the visiting faculty. The first panel dealt with research trends, while the second session dealt with teaching issues, specifically the radical changes taking place at many schools in terms of MBA curricula.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF A DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM

The Marketing Department paid for the costs other than housing once people arrived at Nebraska. The participating schools were asked to pay for the travel expenses and for the rooms for the two nights. Thus, the host department paid for the cocktail party, two continental breakfasts, two lunches, and a banquet. In addition, the papers were bound in a Proceedings, which was paid for by the department. The total costs to the Nebraska Marketing department were a little more than \$3000. Given that approximately 15 Nebraska doctoral students attended the Symposium, the costs of hosting it were cheaper than sending them to a national conference. A national conference would have offered them the opportunity to hear the leaders in the field, but the Symposium offered the opportunity to interact more intimately with a smaller group of people.

Another cost is the time requirement to coordinate the Symposium. Two faculty members were in charge, and two doctoral students were assigned to help them. As Jerry Gosenpud and Bob Wells may be learning with this year's ABSEL Conference, coordinating a conference for the first time can be a trial and error experience. Hopefully having faced this organizational efforts as doctoral students will be beneficial to individuals later in their career.

Benefits

The overall goal was to broaden perspectives, and the conference was successful in this respect. Students were able to develop their conference script, which will hopefully put them in a better position when they attend professional conferences later. Part of our departmental policy of funding student travel was due in part to the belief that students interviewing for a job should not do so at their first conference. Familiarity with the context should help their confidence at a time when the uncertainty level is extremely high. The Symposium also afforded a unique opportunity to learn about doctoral programs elsewhere and to help put one's own doctoral program into better perspective. The presentation also provided an opportunity to make inferences about the research strengths of the neighboring marketing programs. For the presenters, the requirement of making a progress report mid-stream provided an artificial deadline which gave added incentive to develop the paper to a state that he or she would be willing to share with the academic community. The presentation also provides a relatively unique opportunity for the doctoral student, who may well be at a stage when he or she is wallowing in the detail of data collection or data analysis, to regain perspective as to the total scope of the study.

CONCLUSION

The training of doctoral students involves a multitude of processes. Not only are students expected to learn the breadth of the field as well as certain areas in great depth, but also they are expected to learn how to teach and to do research. Underlying all of these domains, however, is the intent to nurture the values that lead people to become good colleagues. The role of conferences in the development of cosmopolitan scholars is not a minor one, and the Nebraska Doctoral Symposium described herein involves the creation of a supportive conference that introduces doctoral students to conference behavior. Thus, the Symposium was an example of a structured experience for doctoral students that occurs outside the standard curriculum.