

ABSEL: THE WAY WE TALK!

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review and reveal trends of research that ABSEL has undergone and identify the impact that the most active ABSEL contributors have had on the research agenda of the organization. The authors use content analysis to reveal patterns of emphasis of research throughout the 27 years of ABSEL's existence. In addition, the authors quantitatively record and report the contribution of ABSEL's leading scholars.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 26 years, ABSEL, as an organization devoted to research as its name suggests on business simulations and experiential learning, has been significantly influenced by the works of a relatively small but committed and energized group of scholars. During its evolution, ABSEL has experienced discernible shifts of emphasis and focus of its research even within the narrowly defined parameters of the organization. The purpose of this paper is to review and reveal trends of research that ABSEL has undergone and quantify the impact that the most active ABSEL contributors have had on the research agenda of the organization.

This paper reviews the research contributions to the organization, as published in *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning*, the ABSEL Proceedings from 1974-2000. The authors use content analysis to reveal patterns of emphasis of research throughout the 27 years of ABSEL's existence.

In addition, the authors quantitatively record and report the contribution of ABSEL's leading scholars. As one would expect, one can observe the emergence and exit of some key contributors to ABSEL while others have demonstrated a pattern of sustained scholarship virtually throughout ABSEL's entire history. It is not by chance that any serious scholar of simulation and games would recognize the names Faria, Gentry, Gosen (Gosenpud), Wolfe, and Wheatley. These researchers have been ABSEL's preeminent scholars for a number of years. The paper demonstrates how truly significant have been their contributions to the body of literature.

There has been an increase in retrospective assessment of ABSEL associated with the 1999 celebration of ABSEL's 25th Anniversary. Several of ABSEL's more recognized authors reviewed the contributions made to the field (see Graf, 1999; Kelley and Brice, 1999; Butler, 1999, and Gold and Pray, 1999). Graf focused his attention on

experiential research in the 1970s, Kelly and Brice focused on the 1980s, Butler reviewed the 1990s, and Gold and Pray focused more narrowly on the development of algorithms over the entire 25-year span. To celebrate the millennial year Faria (2000) reviewed the ABSEL studies for a 25-year period and focused attention on "three important research areas."

Several earlier studies were conducted that focused on significant elements of ABSEL. Butler et al. (1985) considered the "degree of rigor of research designs and the degree to which they address various educational objectives." Markulis et al. (1989) considered a number of other dimensions including author turnover, multiple authorship, institutional representation, etc. In 1991 Markulis et al. narrowed the scope of focus to an "assessment of the award-winning procedures and protocols." Burns and Banasiewicz (1994) look at author co-citations and develop clusters of authors and their common interests. All of these contributions have provided the readers with a better picture of the research and its development.

METHODOLOGY

With the ABSEL conference of 2000 came the introduction of The Bernie Keys Library in CD format. The Keys Library contains the full contents of the ABSEL Proceedings for the years 1974 to 2000 on one CD. The introduction of the Keys Library has made a significant contribution by making ABSEL's research history available in one place. The CD version of the proceedings is easily read using Acrobat Reader. The query utility of Acrobat Reader facilitates searches that otherwise would be time-consuming and tedious. The Keys Library was used to conduct the content analysis reported in this paper.

Content analysis has been described as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Holsti, 1969). Krippendorff (1980) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context." One form of content analysis that is utilized by researchers is classified as semantical content analysis. The authors used the sub-category of designations analysis as a methodological tool for this analysis. The uses of this type of content analysis include; to describe trends in communication, to trace the development of scholarship, and to reveal the focus of attention (Krippendorff, 1980).

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The authors performed a content analysis on the titles of the published contributions to ABSEL over the 27-year span (i.e. from its inception to present). The incidence of occurrence of key words was recorded. The list of key words was established in what might seem to be a somewhat subjective process - perusing the titles of published contributions for ABSEL's early years, the middle years, and for the most recent years. The process of reviewing three time periods was used to minimize the chance of missing a key word that had recently fallen from use and to ensure that key words that had recently emerged would not be excluded (e.g. Internet). A table indicating the usage of key words over time was constructed. Since changes and trends are one of the important results that content analysis can reveal, the authors scrutinized the table looking for significant patterns of usage.

Another dimension of the evolution of the research of ABSEL can be related to a longitudinal review of the contributions made by ABSEL's most prolific scholars. To consider this dimension the library of all ABSEL proceedings was perused again. A table identifying all authors who had been published at least 5 times in the proceedings was constructed. The dates of the initial publication and last publication were recorded as well as the number of contributions in total.

This aspect of the research was not as simple as the first analysis where key words or phrases were the target of the search. A number of minor difficulties were encountered in recording the data on the number per author. One obvious difficulty is that multiple authorship means that the relationship between the number of contributions and the number of instances that an author contributed can be misleading. In other words, the number of authors attributed with contributions exceeds the total number of contributions for the year.

Differences or changes in names or forms of names also made the process difficult. Several authors have used various combinations of their first, middle, and last names. For instance, Faria was listed under "A. J. Faria," "Tony Faria," and "Anthony Faria. John Butler had several different combinations. He has articles credited to John Butler; John Butler, Jr.; John G. Butler; John K. Butler; and John K. Butler, Jr. One explanation offered in the case of John Butler is that the appearance of variants is an indication of feeble attempts by John to adopt a pseudonym. Bruce McAfee is also listed as R. Bruce McAfee; Ron Frazer is also listed as J. Ronald Frazer and even a Frazier. Alvin Burns appears as Alvin D. Burns, Alvin C. Burns, and Alvin S. Burns. Jerry Gosen is also listed under Gosenpud and John Schreier is credited under James Schreier as well. Stephen Snyder almost didn't make the list because he is better known as LT and has contributions under both names. We even found a "Gentry" listed "Centry" incorrectly!

In all of the cases where a question relating to the name arose, the article was checked to see if it provided evidence of a possible error. For example, all of the John Butlers listed teach at Clemson. The authors are not aware that John is teaching with his father, his son, or his brother. Even if

one concedes the possibility of minor errors; if they occurred they did not materially affect the significance of the results. (This is also our way of saying that we have tried diligently to assure the accuracy of our list - but that we apologize for any errors.)

RESULTS

An initial list of 48 words or word combinations that the authors thought might occur frequently in the titles of the proceedings' contributions was used. As mentioned previously, these key words were originally selected based on the authors' knowledge of the field and a perusal of the ABSEL proceedings. Twelve of these words were omitted from the results in Table 1 because they had fewer than 5 occurrences over the 27-year period. An examination of the results indicated some very predictable outcomes, yet some interesting trends and questions about the research ABSEL authors conduct also emerged.

Not surprisingly, the words *Business*, *Simulation*, *Experiential*, and *Learning* were the top 4. Even *ABSEL* was in the top 20 on the list. These words have been constantly used throughout the entire time period. *Case*, *Case Study*, *Game* and *Gaming*, *Model*, and *Exercise* have been consistently used since 1974, however the usage of *Case* and *Case Study* is clearly waning. It also appears that *Research* is being used less frequently. Perhaps this says something about our development as an organization as we have become less self-conscious about defending our research interests and beliefs. *Performance*, *Evaluation*, and *Assessment*, although used throughout ABSEL history, seem to be of even more interest since 1990, with *Evaluation* being used less often and *Assessment* more frequently in recent years. Given the current trend of both governing and accrediting bodies to "assess" everything, this finding is not too surprising. Along the same lines, *Effective* and *Effectiveness* have played a major role throughout ABSEL's history as we try to prove what most members believe - that experiential learning techniques are effective pedagogical methods.

The term *Group* was very popular early on, but seems to be of less interest to ABSELites in the past 10 years. *International*, not surprisingly present throughout the time period, has seen a recent upsurge. This reflects the impact of globalization in the business world as well as ABSEL's efforts to become a more international organization. The term *Systems* appears more often in recent years than it did in the 1980s, and *Design* appears to be making a comeback as well.

Some of the newer additions to the ABSEL vocabulary include *Ethics* and *Ethical*, *Cooperative* and *Collaborative*, *Leadership*, *Strategy*, and, of course, *Internet*. The emergence of these phrases corresponds with the trends observed throughout the general education arena.

Of as much interest might be the terms that we are not using. For instance, *AACSB* has only been used twice over the 27-year period, despite the over-whelming influence that organization seems to have in business schools. *Service*

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Learning, and *Cognitive* have appeared only three times each, while *Algorithm* and *Regression* were used only 6 times combined. Also of note is the use of the word *Review*, which appears primarily around ABSEL's 25th Anniversary. Phrases such as *Inter-Group*, *Meyers-Briggs*, *Ethnocentric*, *New Age Learning*, *Twitch-speed*, and *Typology* are recent additions to the list, and while used infrequently, may indicate new areas of exploration for the membership. Also of interest was the absence of the term *Focus group*.

Table 1 provides an overview of the type of research that has been conducted by the ABSEL membership. It reflects both the mainstay topics as well as some trends and fads. The identification of these key phrases is a clear indication of the breadth of the contributions made to the simulation and experiential learning field.

While conducting the content analysis on the titles of contributions, it became apparent that along with frequently used terminology, there were frequent contributors too. This led to an analysis of the names of those writing for ABSEL as well. Details of the analysis are discussed in the methodology section of this paper.

Table 2 shows all authors with more than 5 publications (defined as an entry in the ABSEL Proceedings, including workshops and panels etc.) since 1974 and the year of their first and "last to date" article. Articles with multiple authors were treated as a contribution for each author.

It's not too surprising, for long-time ABSEL members anyway, to find Tony Faria and Jim Gentry as the top publishers. Both have made significant contributions to the organization, not only through their research, but as ABSEL Fellows, reviewers, chairs, discussants and of course their words of wisdom. Jerry Gosen, Joe Wolfe, Walt Wheatley, Al Burns, and Precha Thavikulvat have all served as President and Hugh Cannon keeps the whole group together as Executive Director.

Burns and Banasiewicz (1994) developed a similar author list in their study of co-citations. A comparison of the two tables reveals that more of the early contributors have been added to the "Where are They Now" category and some of their "Second Decade People" and "Next Generation" have continued to contribute throughout the 1990s. The 90s added some fresh faces to the scene, including Platt, Howard, Leonard, Malik, Wellington, and Pittenger, each with an average of almost 2 contributions per year.

Faria's work originally concentrated on marketing simulations, although a movement toward the evaluation of both simulations and experiential exercises is evident. Faria also "went International" in the 90s, with international

management simulations and work with Russia and Estonia. He was also one of the retrospective authors for the 25th anniversary.

Gentry looked at different "packages" as instructional tools before getting involved in the "theory" and evaluation aspects of simulations. He too was involved in the anniversary's retrospectives. His fairly regular co-author, Burns, had several marketing and market research related contributions before colluding with Gentry on the evaluative and performance tract.

Wolfe's contributions have been in the evaluation area particularly with respect to research design. He also "went International" in the 90s and looked at market-based versus socialist aspects of simulations, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Gosen (nee Gosenpud) has generally been involved in the perceptions of students and their performance on simulations particularly in the strategy and OB areas. Also noteworthy is the direct correlation between the length of his article titles and the length of his name!

Wheatley was the first to introduce topics such as right brain, imagination, visualization, guided imagery, envisioning, scripting, and creativity. This led to "magic" and "music" which will remain Walt's legacy.

CONCLUSIONS

Not surprisingly, the content analysis of ABSEL research, as published in the Proceedings, indicates a strong relationship between the topics of research interest and the name of the organization. Clearly, the dominance of articles that contain the words *Business*, *Simulation*, *Experiential*, and *Learning* makes sense. The continual presence of the terms *Evaluation*, *Performance*, *Assessment*, and *Effectiveness* highlights the interest of the ABSEL membership in validating their activities. This analysis also shows that new topics have emerged and that the organization has kept up with the changes in both educational thinking and technology.

The core researchers include some of the early members; Faria, Gentry, Gosen, Wolfe and Burns, with a large group of contributors joining in the 1980s. However, the group of researchers has and will continue to evolve as the demographics of the membership change. We have already seen the "retirement" of some of the founders, but new contributors are taking their place and making their mark as well. Perhaps future researchers will have an impact in a whole new arena not yet apparent.

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TABLE 1 CONTENT ANALYSIS

Year	Simulation	Business	Experiential	Learning	Game	Exercise	Performance	Case (Study)	Research	Evaluation	Gaming	Group	Effective(ness)	Model	Assessment	International	Systems
1974	13	13	2	5							8				1		1
1975	14	10	8	5	4	1	4	3	4	2	3	2	1				
1976	27	9	14	19	2	7	10	1	4	3	2	7	1	2	1		4
1977	12	9	16	8	8	5	2	1	2	2	3	1	2		2		
1978	14	5	11	17	4	4	7	6	4	2	4	3	3		1	1	1
1979	21	13	8	10	8	3	2	6	4	1	4	3	3		2	1	
1980	20	10	20	11	4	7	5	4	3	6	4	4	2	2	2	1	
1981	25	17	22	23	9	4	3	5	5	5	2	1	3	3	1	3	3
1982	17	12	20	21	6	7	2	3	4	5	1	3	1	2	2	2	2
1983	8	12	6	7	9	6	3		3			2	2	2	1		
1984	16	16	12	8	5	9	1	1	1	2	4	4	2	3	1		1
1985	14	7	10	5	5	2	2	4	2		2	1		1	1		1
1986	15	11	12	9	7	8	4	2	4	1		3	1		3	1	1
1987	16	14	7	6	7	3	5	2	5	2	1		1	1	1		4
1988	24	11	10	7	6	4	4	1	4			1		3	1	2	2
1989	17	12	8	5	3	4	7	1		2	1	2	2			1	1
1990	24	18	18	15	6	8	10	2	1	6	1	3	3	6	3	4	
1991	15	15	8	6	6	4	8	3		2	1		1	1	1		3
1992	24	23	14	11	5	5	11	2	2	1		5	4	2	1	2	4
1993	16	16	19	6	4	8	5	6		4	2		4	2	1	4	2
1994	17	11	6	12	4	2	4	1		2	3	1	2	2	2	3	3
1995	21	11	18	11	4	7	3	2	1	3	1		3	4	1	1	2
1996	8	10	9	12	2	6	3	2	3	1	1		1		1	3	2
1997	17	18	10	23	10	5	6	4	1	2	2	2	4	2	4	3	2
1998	13	15	10	15	6	6	1			1	3	1	1		4	1	
1999	23	24	14	15	9	7	5	1	1		2	3		4	3	3	1
2000	13	10	9	17	4	5	1		1	2	2			3	3	4	
	464	352	321	309	147	137	118	63	59	57	57	52	47	45	44	40	40

Year	Training	ABSEL	Design	Strategy	Leadership	Pedagogy/Pedagogical	Ethics/Ethical	Internet	Demand	Cognitive	Participant(s)	Survey	Cooperative (Learning)	Grading	Collaborative	Player	Total Pubs
1974	2	1	2		1						2						53
1975	4	1					1			1		1				2	43
1976	2		2								4	2		1			55
1977	4	1			1		1				2						48
1978																	49
1979	1		4			1											69
1980	1		2		1			2	2	1			1				69
1981		1	3		1	1				1	1	1	1			1	86
1982				2				1	1								81
1983				2						2							43
1984		2		2	1	1			2								68
1985	1	2	2			1											49
1986		4	1			1								1			68
1987		2		1				1						1			66
1988	1	2	3	2				1	1			2		2			63
1989		2	1	2			1										45
1990	3		1	1				1	2		1						97
1991	2	1	1	2	3	2			1		1						60
1992	2	1	1	2	3	4	4	1	1				1			2	92
1993	2			4	1	1				3			1		1		75
1994	2	2	1	2	2	2	1			1			2				58
1995	4			2	2		1		1	1		1	2				78
1996	1		1				2	4				1			1		51
1997	1	1	3		1	3	3	3	2			1	2	1			83
1998	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	3		1	1				1		72
1999	2	7	2	5	2	1		4			1						81
2000		2		2	2		1	2	1	1					2		59
	36	33	32	32	22	20	18	17	16	15	13	10	8	8	5	5	1761

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TABLE 2
ABSEL AUTHORS (1974-2000)

	First Year	Latest Year	Article Count		First Year	Latest Year	Article Count
Faria, A. J.	1974	2000	37	Jackson, George	1982	1998	8
Gentry, James	1974	1999	37	Jensen, Ronald	1974	1999	8
Gosen (Gosenpud), Jerry	1980	2000	33	King, Albert	1977	1984	8
Wolfe, Joseph	1976	2000	32	Oppenheimer, Robert	1984	1993	8
Wheatley, Walter	1986	1999	29	Overby, John	1988	2000	8
Burns, Alvin	1975	1999	27	Sampson, Nancy	1977	1995	8
Cannon, Hugh	1987	2000	26	Snyder, Stephen (LT)	1993	1999	8
Thavikulvat, Precha	1982	2000	26	Stratton, Willaim	1978	1998	8
Anderson, Philip	1984	2000	24	Whiteley, Richard	1989	1997	8
Fritzche, David	1974	2000	23	Whitney, Gary	1982	1992	8
Markulis, Peter	1983	2000	23	Decker, Ronald	1981	1995	7
Strang, Daniel	1978	2000	23	Halterman, Carroll	1979	1995	7
Graf, Lee	1980	2000	22	Kline, Donald	1981	1994	7
Biggs, William	1975	2000	21	Mills, Janet	1983	1988	7
Brenenstuh, Daniel	1975	1988	20	Palia, Aspy	1989	2000	7
Butler, John	1981	2000	18	Peach, Brian (E. Brian)	1997	2000	7
Goosen, Kenneth	1974	1999	18	Pillutla, Sharma	1994	2000	7
Lawton, Leigh	1986	2000	18	Schellenberger, Robert	1981	1990	7
Pray, Thomas	1978	2000	18	Ward, Willaim	1982	1990	7
Washbush, John	1991	2000	18	Whatley, Arthur	1976	1985	7
Schreier, James	1975	1990	17	Winchell, Michael	1992	2000	7
Frazer, J. Ronald	1975	1996	16	Boozer, Robert	1993	2000	6
Smith, Jerald	1974	1999	16	Chesteen, Susan	1990	1994	6
Teach, Richard	1984	2000	16	Churchill, Geoffry	1974	1980	6
Dickenson, John	1976	2000	15	Cotter, Richard	1985	1998	6
Gold, Steven	1981	2000	15	Curran, Kent	1987	1990	6
Keys, Bernard	1974	1999	15	Edge, Alfred	1979	1992	6
Page, Diana	1985	2000	15	Lambert, David	1980	1988	6
Patz, Alan	1987	1999	15	Leonard, Thomas	1994	1999	6
Barton, Richard	1974	1990	14	Morgan, Sandra	1993	2000	6
Hemmasi, Masoud	1987	2000	14	Newstrom, John	1982	1989	6
Maddox, E. Nick	1987	2000	14	Roderick, Roger	1979	1993	6
Catalanello, Ralph	1976	1994	13	Roge, Joseph	1995	1997	6
Hornaday, Robert	1986	2000	13	Ruble, Thomas	1978	1990	6
Nulsen, Ray	1974	1996	13	Wilterding, Jim	1980	1997	6
Roberts, Ralph	1974	1999	13	Wolfe, Douglas	1974	1979	6
Sanders, Patricia	1982	2000	13	Armstrong, Terry	1989	1997	5
Chiesl, Newell	1979	1994	12	Badgett, Tom	1977	1983	5
House, Willaim	1977	1995	12	Basuray, Tom	1979	1981	5
Gomolka, Eugene	1982	1990	11	Beatty, Richard	1974	1977	5
Kelley, Lane	1978	1999	11	Boyd, Charles	1982	1985	5
McAfee, Bruce (R. Bruce)	1978	2000	11	Bradley, Michael	1988	1996	5
Platt, Richard	1992	1999	11	Byrne, Eugene	1975	1979	5
Crino, Michael	1978	2000	10	Efraty, David	1994	1998	5
Howard, Barbara	1995	2000	10	Fuhs, F. Paul	1980	1988	5
Leonard, Nancy	1994	2000	10	Hall, Jeremy	1994	1996	5
Malik, S. Dolly	1995	2000	10	Hsu, Ti	1985	1998	5
Vik, Gretchen	1979	2000	10	Hunsaker, Johanna	1981	1993	5
Wellington, William	1990	1997	10	Hunsaker, Phillip	1977	1990	5
Dutton, Richard	1976	1992	9	Klepeter, Wendy	1991	1995	5
Napier, Herman	1974	1988	9	Micklich, Douglas	1998	2000	5
Pittenger, Khush	1996	2000	9	Miesing, Paul	1981	1991	5
Scott, Timothy	1994	2000	9	Morgan, Fred	1985	1990	5
Certo, Samuel	1974	1985	8	Morse, Kenneth	1997	2000	5
Chanin, Michael	1982	1991	8	Moschella, Paul	1983	1999	5
Golden, Peggy	1986	1990	8	Raveed, Sion	1978	1981	5
Hoover, J. Duane	1974	1980	8	Savaia, Antonio	1993	2000	5
				Wingender, John	1987	1993	5

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