

BUILDING HIGHER DOCTORAL PROGRAMS TO DRIVE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTS FOR INTEGRATING A EUROPEAN MODEL IN THE U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an introductory discussion of the value and theoretical structure of a higher doctorate in American academia. The theory is that such a structure would help to guide academic careers and provide a credentialing system that is absent in most accrediting processes and disappearing with the decline of tenure. The goal is to ignite discussion about how to better support and recognize faculty in a dynamic, complex educational market.

INTRODUCTION

As credentialing and certification become more important in almost every career path in the American workforce there has been increased emphasis on the delivery of, and success rates in, higher education. For many institutions this has proven to be a valuable shift that continues to drive an increasingly diverse student population and motivates high growth in nontraditional student enrollment. Combined with formal education is the increasing emphasis on obtaining professional certifications and pursuing continuing professional development.

Some of this is being seen among the professoriate, particularly in required professional development work and the award of certificates for completed courses of professional development. The issue of actual credentialing beyond the doctorate, however, is one that continues to be absent in American higher education. While there is perhaps an argument that tenure has traditionally served this purpose the decreasing use of the tenure process in the United States leaves a gap that needs to be filled. From 1975 to 2007 the percentage of full time faculty who are not in tenure track positions increased from 18.6 percent to 37.2 percent (Ehrenberg, 2012). The challenge is to design or adopt a process by which faculty members who excel in their work can be recognized and properly rewarded.

INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING

In Business there is a common practice called benchmarking. Basically, benchmarking consists of researching a firm's industry, or even related industries, and identifying

best practices that can be integrated to improve company performance. In considering how to properly recognize professors who go above and beyond the requirements of their jobs the best first step may be to examine how other educational systems answer the question. While not often considered an international market, higher education is shifting to a global model of "an import-export market in positional goods, characterized by uni-directional student flows and asymmetrical cultural transformations" (Marginson, 2006, p 18). As the market shifts to more international competition international benchmarking should naturally follow.

Perhaps the most formal example is the practice of habilitation. "The habilitation, which is normally a single-authored monograph, is the most important academic qualification in the German system" (Muller-Camen & Salzgeber, 2005, p 280). In addition to the monograph professors also present a public lecture and discussion as well as compile a documented history of lecturing at a university (PhD and Postdoc). Following the completion of habilitation faculty members not only hold the title and recognition of advanced standing beyond the holder of a doctorate but this is also usually a requirement for serving on dissertation committees. This process closely mirrors the traditional tenure process in American universities, but the declining use of tenure in many institutions leaves a gap in recognition.

The other most frequently seen approach is that of the earned, rather than honorary, higher doctorate. Usually seen in Great Britain and other countries following the British educational model like Australia and New Zealand, although present in other places, this is a similar

process to habilitation but without the connection to doctoral teaching qualifications. While specific practices vary among institutions the general approach and qualification process is very similar.

The higher doctorate, which may be awarded in any number of different disciplines, is designed as a mechanism by which accomplished faculty members can be recognized for their success in scholarship. As defined by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2008):

Higher doctorates may be awarded in recognition of a substantial body of original research undertaken over the course of many years. Typically a portfolio of published work which has been previously published in a peer-reviewed context is submitted for assessment. Most higher education awarding bodies restrict candidacy to graduates or academic staff of several years' standing (p 23).

Primarily, the higher doctorates are based on contributions to scholarship, most frequently demonstrated by published research. Candidates assemble a portfolio of published work, often but not always with a synthesis piece explaining the path of the candidate's inquiries, and submit the complete collection to a review committee at the university. The committee reviews the work and makes a decision on whether or not the candidate's portfolio justifies the award of the degree. If a portfolio is declined then there are varying policies about when or if a candidate may reapply for recognition.

DOMESTIC BENCHMARKING

While there are excellent models available internationally there are also valuable assessment models in use in the United States, although they are seen in accreditation organizations rather than individual recognition programs. As one example the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) has a variety of qualification standards for Business faculty as either academically or professionally qualified. These qualifications require certain academic credentials, but beyond that focus on a professor's teaching skills and their contributions to scholarship or professional service as a total package required to certify them as qualified to teach in an ACBSP-accredited Business school. Another business accreditation model, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) follows a similar model of faculty assessment.

While both of these accrediting models, as well as those used by regional accrediting agencies, review and recognize faculty accomplishments in their fields they lack any sort of lasting certification mechanism. Schools under review for accreditation will receive the results of the faculty

assessment but faculty members are not credentialed for any period of time as certified under a particular system nor does approval at one school during one accreditation review necessarily guarantee approval in another review later in their careers. The reform of accreditation standards is far beyond the scope of this discussion, but the lack of a permanent credential does raise the question of how faculty can be better recognized for progress and accomplishment in their career.

A THEORETICAL AMERICAN MODEL

As there is no standard higher doctorate process in place in the United States the professoriate has an opportunity to create one. While excellence in research is certainly a noble goal it seems like too narrow a category by which to measure a professor's career. If, as a profession, the American professoriate values the multiple areas in which a professor contributes to the intellectual life of a university then the qualification process should encompass excellence beyond published work.

The primary challenge in designing such a program may be the definition of what accomplishments should look like. Much of the most important work that professors do is difficult to quantify and, by extension, is difficult to rank across candidates. This is ultimately not different from so much of what is done in academic settings every day. Thus, a qualitative assessment of candidate achievements will be at the core of the higher doctorate process.

Prior to the assessment will be a set of basic qualifying standards for applicants. Reasonably it takes time to build a portfolio of published work and a record of teaching and service. With this time in mind the higher doctorate may be linked to specific points of career advancement, such as promotion to associate professor or the award of tenure. There may also be other qualifying elements such as possession of an earned terminal degree before the award of the higher doctorate. Once such threshold measures are established candidates meeting them can advance to the assessment phase.

The assessment will focus on identifying and reviewing candidate performance across a range of professional responsibilities. These will include research as well as teaching, service to the institution, and service to the profession and/or community. Measures of success in these different aspects of professional activity will differ, but a key to a comprehensive model will be the proper inclusion of all factors in the review.

Scholarly production may be the easiest element to evaluate, although it does have its challenges. Because scholarship's output is a measurable product, specifically publications and presentations, the base measure for successful

scholarship is relatively simple to quantify. Beyond this basic quantitative measure, however, there are many questions about how to gauge a scholar's success. At the most basic level it would probably be acceptable to require all published work submitted for the award of a higher doctorate to be peer-reviewed. Beyond just the peer-review threshold is the question of how the overall value of the work is judged.

If an applicant has a low overall production of scholarly publications but the majority of those publications are in the top journal in their field does that mean more, or as much, as another applicant who has a high volume of peer-reviewed publications in lesser journals or conference proceedings? This highlights the qualitative nature of the review process. There are different measures of scholarly productivity and it would ultimately be up to a university or the review committee to make decisions about how such things would be considered. At some research-focused universities there is an unwritten rule that a publication in a top tier journal is required for tenure, and that could reasonably be carried forward to the higher doctorate review. At other institutions with a greater focus on teaching a different measure of scholarship may be more appropriate. This institutional focus will also inform the emphasis placed on other elements of the assessment process.

Teaching would be another of the three overall measures of candidate performance. More so than research this will be a very difficult area to quantify and will be very much a qualitative review of available evidence. Student evaluations of a faculty member's performance would certainly be one factor, but do not encompass everything about a professor's contribution to the teaching environment of a department. Other elements such as courses developed or redesigned, variety of courses taught, oversight of graduate teaching assistants, mentorship of other faculty, and other contributions to the delivery of material in a department could all be considered in evaluating a professor's teaching ability. Again, different institutions would use and weight different measures in different ways based on their environment, but a wide variety of professional service in the realm of instruction should be considered when looking at a candidate's overall quality.

The third and final broad category concerns professional service. This encompasses both service to the university and also service to the discipline. Various factors to consider may include committee service, serving in leadership roles in professional organizations, consulting, and other work in the field. Specific measures would depend on the common practice of a particular academic discipline as well as what a particular institution requires for faculty service to committees and other activities.

At this point in the discussion the review process is beginning to sound very similar to a tenure review, and that is a fair assessment of the process. What differentiates this from tenure is arguable but the potential place for such a system in the academy today is unfortunately quite clear. Across the United States tenured and tenure-track professorships are a decreasing percentage of the total professoriate. Institutions are moving to have fewer tenure-track positions, are eliminating tenure altogether, or simply did not have tenure and as they grow are choosing not to adopt it.

This fading of tenure in the academic system leaves a void for professional achievement that needs to be filled with a new credentialing process. The higher doctorate, as practiced in many other countries, can provide an answer that gives faculty the opportunity to have their body of work closely reviewed by senior academics and, if warranted, credentials them with a line on the vita and a different set of regalia that sets them apart from younger, less experienced members of the academy.

CONCLUSION

In an academic environment of increasing complexity, dynamic competitive conditions, and more challenging work conditions faculty need an avenue for professional development and recognition. Zusman (2005) says of higher education in our century that. "Changes both within and outside the academy are altering its character – its students, faculty, governance, curriculum, functions, and very place in society" (p 5). Adopting a higher doctorate model would be one way to provide faculty members with a template of professional accomplishment that leads to success. By measuring their efforts against a set review process at their institution they would have the opportunity to more deliberately plan and execute their own growth as scholars. Were these requirements to be public knowledge it would even give faculty the ability to look at other institutions and understand what expectations are, how they might fit, or how they may need to alter their professional pursuits to better match a desired future position.

This proposal is one that raises more questions than it answers. In our current shifting academic marketplace, however, such discussions need to happen. To continue producing and mentoring successful scholars, and by extension to continue educating students and producing quality contributions to scholarship, recognition and reward processes need to catchup with the market.

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