

MOTIVE FOR REVIEWING HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION
DOCTORAL DEGREE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the research question: “What is the Motive for the Review of Higher Education Administration (HEA) Doctoral Degree Programs? The data derived from a larger study, “Impact of Program Review on Higher Education Administration Doctoral Degree Programs” that documents, through in-depth case studies, the processes faculty and administrators used to review two HEA doctoral curricula and the impact of the reviews on the programs. In addition to the motive for reviewing HEA doctoral degree programs, the larger study examined issues ranging from the guidelines, coordination, and communication processes used to review HEA doctoral curricula, to the impact of program evaluation on the programs. The larger study also explored factors that promote or hinder the ability of faculty and administrators to use review outcomes to effect change in HEA doctoral degree programs.

The results of the study established that faculty and administrators are deeply involved in HEA doctoral degree programs and review them to improve, justify, or reallocate their resources. The findings of this research also indicated that program reviews could save HEA programs from discontinuation as well as protect their resources.

Motive for Reviewing Higher Education Administration (HEA)

Doctoral Degree Programs

Objective of Study

This paper addresses the research question: “What is the Motive for the Review of Higher Education Administration Doctoral Degree Programs? The data derived from a larger study, “Impact of Program Review on Higher Education Administration Doctoral Degree Programs” that documents, through indepth case studies, the processes faculty and administrators used to review two HEA doctoral curricula and the impact of the reviews on the programs.

Context

Doctoral programs in HEA have evolved markedly since Granville Stanley Hall taught the first course in the field in 1893. Currently, over 150 HEA doctoral programs exist in the United States (ASHE Program Directory, 2001). Despite this growth, relatively little is known regarding how institutions update the programs to align with societal changes and the attendant complexities of administering colleges and universities. Dressel and Mayhew (1974), in the only comprehensive study of HEA graduate programs, as well as Miller and Vacik (1996), in a recent study of HEA programs, speculated that inadequate information on HEA programs’ update could be attributed to lack of a system for accreditation in the field of higher education. Dressel and Mayhew also believed that institutional introspection in the form of review might be the most viable means for handling update and proliferation issues in the field.

Virtually all colleges and universities have turned to program review as an avenue for ensuring that academic programs reflect current societal changes. Increased institutional reliance on program review for assessing academic programs has been driven by developments such as the accountability movement (Benjamin, 1994; Ewell, 1994; Gardner, 1994; Mitchell, 1987; Popham, 1975; Stark & Thomas, 1994), vigorous competition for fewer students in the 1980s and 1990s, and the need to make programs responsive to a changing society (Arns & Poland, 1980; Davis, 1994).

Institutions now rely on evaluation to analyze programs to determine which ones to discontinue, modify, or improve. Barak and Breier (1990) stated, for example, that practically every institution, irrespective of size or mission, now engages in some type of formal or informal program review. Similarly, Stark and Thomas noted that in the 1990s, assessing student outcomes in nearly all of higher education became “the ordinary course of business” (1994, p. xvii). Depending on the institution or state agency, program review results may be used to make decisions on program quality, improvement, or discontinuation and resource allocation or reallocation. Other roles of review include but are not limited to meeting state-level mandates for evaluations and for responding to federal requirements for assessment of professional programs. Over the decades, the functions of academic program review have involved administrators, faculty, and governing boards in their processes and outcomes (Conrad & Wilson, 1985).

Focus of This Paper in Larger Project:

This paper focuses on one segment of the “Impact of Program Review on Higher Education Administration Doctoral Degree Programs”. Future papers will examine additional issues ranging from the guidelines, coordination, and communication

processes used to review HEA doctoral curricula to the impact of program review on the programs. Future papers will also explore factors that promote or hinder the ability of faculty and administrators to use review outcomes to effect change in HEA doctoral degree programs.

Theoretical Framework Underlying the Motive for Reviewing HEA Doctoral Programs

Conrad's (1982, 1978) grounded theory of academic change served as the theoretical framework for this study because, specifically, its constructs of social structure and administrative intervention provided some insight into the rationales for reviewing the HEA doctoral programs examined.

Regarding social structure, Conrad (1978) posited that the underlying sources of academic change are the external and internal social structural forces that frequently threaten the status quo. He espoused that fundamental conflicts embedded in institutions' social structures become visible when one or more external or internal pressures threaten the norm. Structural reorganization, for instance, could cause changes in distribution of power and in turn compel groups to reevaluate their goals. External pressures include curriculum practices at other institutions, new faculty, and shrinking financial conditions and key internal forces include structural reorganizations. Conrad described administrative intervention as the point at which in response to interest groups' pressures for change, an administrative agent chooses the mechanism for the reexamination of academic policy, thereby providing an immediate impetus for change.

Sampling Strategy and Methodology

The population for this study consisted of the 152 American HEA doctoral programs listed in the *ASHE Higher Education Program Directory* as of 2001. Some of the programs reside in public colleges and universities, while the others exist in private institutions. Criterion and stratified purposeful sampling methods were used to select the sample. The study employed the criterion technique to select the two HEA doctoral programs. The criteria that guided the selection of the two programs were that each must have been reviewed during the past five years and have a general HEA focus. The stratified purposeful method was used to identify research participants. Within each program, this researcher selected from three strata of people who had participated in the review of the doctoral program. These strata included: the coordinator of the program, the chair of the department in which the program resides, and all other full-time faculty teaching in the program. At each site, this sampling method yielded at least four interviewees.

This investigator originally endeavored to use three HEA doctoral programs for this study. However, the third site had to drop out of participation at the last minute due to issues internal to the program, which made its use as a research site impolitic at that moment. This study's reliance on two programs for the provision of data may have affected its potential for contribution. However, the intense and robust interviewing of all full-time faculty and administrators associated with the programs as well as the extensive use of documentation, strengthened the findings of the study. Furthermore, scholars (such as Becker, 1968; Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 2001; Stake, 1998; Wilson, 1979; Yin, 1994) support using one or two cases to intensively investigate a

phenomenon. For instance, Merriam noted, “the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (2001, p. 199). She also posited that a case study results in a rich and holistic narrative of a phenomenon, which provides insights and meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. Consequently, the use of two cases to study the impact of reviews on HEA doctoral programs is sufficient, since the study’s indepth design provided a robust investigation into the issues at each site.

Qualitative interviews and documentation were used to collect data from the eight faculty and administrators who participated in the study. Data obtained from the sites were analyzed using chronological, theoretical, and comparative procedures.

Assumptions and Definitions of Terms

Two assumptions guided this part of the investigation. First, the study assumed that academic program review can be an effective tool for updating HEA doctoral degree programs. Second, it assumed that in the absence of a formal accreditation process in the field of higher education (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974; Miller & Vacik, 1996; Verber, 1995), HEA faculty and administrators would generally turn to academic program review as a tool for revising their curricula. Thus, the investigation assumed that improving our understanding of the motives for reviewing HEA doctoral degree curricula would represent a contribution to institutions that offer such programs.

The terms *academic program review* and *program evaluation* were considered synonymous and used interchangeably throughout this paper. *Academic program review* is defined as a process used by colleges and universities to conduct curricula appraisals in order to improve them (Barak & Breier, 1990). In addition, this investigator considered

the terms *motive* and *rationale* synonymous and employed them interchangeably in this paper. *Motive* is defined as an impetus or incitement to action.

Brief Overview of Motive for HEA Doctoral Program Reviews

The common rationale for review involvement at both HEA doctoral programs examined was curricula improvement. The secondary rationale for each was different. Faculty and administrators at the first program conducted their review in order to reallocate resources, and faculty and administrators at the second program conducted their evaluation in order to justify and protect its resources.

Results/Conclusions

Three motives for reviewing HEA doctoral programs emerged from the investigation: a) program improvement, b) resource reallocation, and c) program justification to protect existing resources. Additionally, social structure as sources of academic change and administrative intervention constituted the theoretical constructs that provided some understanding for the rationales for reviewing the HEA doctoral programs examined.

Program improvement. Faculty and administrators at both HEA doctoral programs noted program improvement as one rationale for reviewing their curricula. At the first program, this motive is outlined in the institution's *Guidelines for Conducting Evaluations of Academic Programs*. This document stipulates that the university requires faculty and administrators to review academic programs every decade, the purpose of which is to enhance the quality and attractiveness of academic programs. The document further specifies that in rare instances, it may be determined during a review that a current

degree program is no longer viable; in which case, the program may be restructured or discontinued. Faculty and administrators at the second HEA doctoral program also indicated program improvement as a rationale for reviewing their curriculum. The faculty and administrators felt the need to conduct the evaluation as they prepared to expand their offerings in the distance education area and train Taiwanese higher education professors. While the institution mandated the review of the first HEA doctoral program, the institution of the second program did not mandate its review. Rather, the faculty and administrators themselves proactively engaged in the process because they saw the need to improve their program and secure its standing within the School of Education.

Resource reallocation. The second motive for reviewing the HEA doctoral curriculum at the first institution was resource reallocation. At the time, the School of Education was undergoing a downsizing and reorganization, mandated by the provost. As part of this scale back, the provost directed the dean of education to review all academic programs in the Department of Educational Administration and use the process to trim tenured faculty by 25% and academic programs by 19% (HEA Strategic Plan Document, 1999). In addition to reviewing the department, the dean also convened a blue ribbon committee that decided that the school's primary mission was Educational Administration (which prepares K-12 personnel) and that some programs, including the HEA, be eliminated. The program review enabled the HEA faculty and administrators to successfully document their program's contributions to the school's mission, thus saving the program from discontinuation.

Program justification to protect existing resources. The other motive for reviewing the second HEA doctoral curriculum was program justification, aimed at

protecting the program's resources and solidifying its standing in the School of Education. The faculty felt the need to justify the program's existence and prevent the school from reallocating its resources, in preparation for the arrival of a new dean. This situation prompted the faculty to proactively document the program's contributions as a means of fortifying its position. As noted by the program coordinator, ". . . in the current environment of our university. . . it's not the allocation of new resources, it's *protection of existing resources* [italics added]—in other words, program maintenance."

Theoretical constructs explaining motives for reviewing HEA doctoral programs.

The constructs of social structures as sources of academic change as well as administrative intervention (Conrad, 1985) help elucidate the rationales for reviewing both HEA doctoral programs investigated. Two motives—program improvement and resource reallocation—led to the review of the first program. Regarding program improvement, social structural forces in the form of external pressures to be competitive with other institutions' offerings, not necessarily to conform to curricula practices, but rather to offer quality programs, led to this review. Resource reallocation, the second motive, also reveals external social structural forces in the form of shrinking financial resources within the institution. Regarding the second HEA doctoral program, two rationales—program improvement and program justification—led to the review. External pressures, such as the acquisition of additional professors, equipped the HEA faculty with the resources they needed to conduct their evaluation. Furthermore, internal pressures in the form of structural reorganizations acted as sources of academic change for this program. The reorganizations included the replacement of the dean, which compelled faculty to review the curriculum in order to protect its resources. Other structural

realignments were the governor and the Board of Regents, who urged HEA's department to offer online courses. These external and internal social structural forces changed the distribution of power at both HEA doctoral programs and compelled the faculty and administrators to reevaluate their priorities and review their programs.

The second construct in the theory of academic change that provides interpretation for the rationales for reviewing both HEA doctoral programs is administrative intervention. Conrad (1978) described this construct as the point at which an administrative agent provides the motive for change in response to interest groups' pressures. Administrative agents, in the persons of the provost and the dean at the first program and the program coordinator at the second program, provided both the rationales and the mechanisms for reviewing the HEA doctoral programs, in response to interest groups' pressures.

Importance of the Study and Implications for Practice

In this era when research institutions' resources are stretched to their limits, some universities are discontinuing doctoral programs not deemed central to institutions' missions or combining doctoral curricula into larger programs, making the doctoral programs obscure within departments, schools, and institutions. Through program review findings, the HEA doctoral programs examined in this study learned strategies for better positioning themselves for future growth, development, and survival in the face of declining financial and human resources.

Although researchers (such as Baldrige & Deal, 1975; Barak & Breier, 1990; Barak & Mets, 1995; Barak & Sweeney, 1995; Conrad & Wilson, 1985; Craven, 1980; Dressel, 1961; Khalil, 1990; Larson, 1985; Seeley, 1981; Smith, 1979; Wilson, 1982)

have delineated many motives for evaluating academic programs in colleges and universities, the findings of this study suggest that the rationales for reviewing HEA doctoral programs could include program improvement, program justification, and resource reallocation. Institutions may also evaluate HEA doctoral programs to justify resource reallocation or to protect the programs' resources. Additionally, while faculty may initiate an HEA doctoral review, sometimes, an institution may provide the directive for such a review.

The findings of this study regarding program justification and resource protection as review rationales are particularly instructive for the survival of HEA doctoral programs in the face of shrinking resources. As noted in the second case, faculty felt it necessary to evaluate their program to justify its resources and prevent the incoming dean from reallocating them. In addition, the deans of education did not perceive both HEA doctoral programs as central to their schools' missions. Under these circumstances, faculty and administrators could use program justification as a strategy to not only protect and maintain HEA doctoral programs' resources, but also to highlight their contributions to the missions of Schools of Education.

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