

PERSPECTIVES

Invited article

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THE FUTURE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION: NEW CHOICES AND NEW MODELS

“If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it.”

Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION

The relevance and impact of universities causes frequent debate in the international context. Every congress and seminar has a panel to analyze evaluation indicators. The question that arises is: do we impact society? In 2017, the University of São Paulo (USP) implemented changes in its evaluation of units and lecturers. A Permanent Evaluation Committee (PEC) was created, with representatives of USP lecturers in the areas of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, along with representatives from the Biological and Health Sciences, and representatives from the Exact and Technological Sciences.

It is important to realize the profound differences that exist between the various areas of universities and also between seemingly similar areas. There are great differences between the expectations of the teaching, research, and extension activities in areas such as Literature, Cinema, and Administration, just to mention three domains within the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at USP. This demonstrates the challenge of defining the parameters to establish the expectations from a lecturer and therefore, the role of graduate programs that train lecturers for teaching, research, and extension activities.

This introduction, which is limited to the account of a specific, personal, and institutional experience, illustrates the challenges of defining the knowledge requirements relevant to graduate programs. Traditionally, a basic distinction is assumed to exist between graduate programs focused on basic sciences and applied sciences, or, as some prefer to term them, programs focused on scientific training and those focused on vocational training. Programs focused on scientific training cover the so-called hard sciences and those that, in theory, should not be concerned with the immediate application of their results, for example, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Philosophy, among others. Programs focused on professional research cover those areas in which the research

**MOACIR DE MIRANDA
OLIVEIRA JUNIOR**
mirandaoliveira@usp.br
ORCID: 0000-0002-6289-9600

*Universidade de São Paulo,
Faculdade de Economia,
Administração e Contabilidade -
São Paulo - SP, Brazil*

results are expected to have a practical application, and include, for example, Medicine, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Law, Administration, Economics, and Accounting, among others. An enormous challenge emerges based on this difference between scientific and professional research, when it comes to determining the role of a graduate program in training researchers. When an institution, whether it is a research support agency, a university or a school with some courses, defines the forms of evaluation, it is promoting what should be prioritized in the programs under its aegis. This situation makes it difficult to define rules that are valid for all programs, whether scientific or professional.

As a case study, the graduate programs in Administration will be considered Administration, which is still taught in the first year of undergraduate courses, emerges as a field of knowledge from pioneering studies on the so-called US Factory Floor in the early twentieth century (Morgan, 2006). It is, therefore, a recent area in the process of academic legitimacy, and as expected, given its relative newness, is based on related disciplines that possess greater theoretical traditions, such as Economics, Engineering, Sociology, and Psychology. I understand that a graduate program in Administration needs to contemplate, in the training of its students, some important dimensions:

- Knowledge and technology transfer to society
- Impact of research and publication
- Non-traditional teaching
- Internationalization and nationalization

KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER TO SOCIETY

Large Brazilian public universities, where most of the scientific production in the country is concentrated (Scimago Institutions Rankings World Report, 2017), still face a great deal of prejudice regarding their association with business. This prejudice is founded in concerns about scientific research being manipulated by the immediate interests of companies or governments. Nevertheless, similar experiences in different countries must be analyzed to explore this debate, which is decisive for the future of Brazilian universities.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from international experiences. In his book *MIT and the Rise of Entrepreneurial Science*, Etzkowitz (2002) provides a historical account of MIT's

pioneering role in creating forms of interaction with the industry and then diffusing these models to other schools. This interaction is stimulated by the perspective that science can be an important driver for knowledge-intensive economic development.

Etzkowitz (2002) explains that initiatives to transform research into applications in society emerged in the early nineteenth century in Germany, although on a limited scale. These initiatives also occurred in England and other countries with a strong scientific research tradition. Until the late nineteenth century, basic and applied research had no significant demarcation in the United States. The author indicates that the injection of funds into academia by large and prosperous industries created in the late nineteenth century was accompanied by fears that the donors were trying to influence the research agenda. The creation of a basic research ideology was part of the effort made by universities to establish a secure space for science, even when funded by these contributors. This distinction between basic and applied research continued until World War II, when scientists who had gained experience within the basic research culture became involved in war-related engineering projects, such as the radar, which also led to the development of radio astronomy and elucidation of theoretical issues in cosmology during the post-war period. This theoretical merger among those researchers during the war eliminated some of the gaps between basic research and engineering.

The university-business relationship dilemma faced by the US and other countries, in the middle of the previous century, still persists in Brazil. Graduate programs in Administration in Brazil can contribute to this debate by presenting methods for university-business interaction.

Knowledge and technology transfer to society can take place through: (1) Creation of startups, (2) Patents, (3) Licensing, and (4) Traditional means such as the production of academic and scientific articles.

Several studies offer new pedagogical and methodological approaches to entrepreneurship teaching (Garbuio, Dong, Lin, Tschang, & Lovallo, 2017). There seems to be a clear "window of opportunity" for Master's degrees and professional doctorate programs (recently regulated in the country) to play a relevant role in this transference. The entrepreneurial university concept (Etzkowitz, 1983) and the role of international university rankings, which have technology and knowledge transfer in common (despite the different nomenclature), can be important stimuli for university-business interaction. The university and its graduate programs in Administration can play a major role in the innovation ecosystems of their regions and in Brazil (Clarysse, Wright, Bruneel, & Mahajanb, 2014).

IMPACT OF RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING: IMPACT FOR WHOM?

In the 1990s, academics in the field of Administration faced questions that were representative of the stage of maturity of their particular regions in Brazil, such as: “How many of your works were approved by the congresses?,” “Will you be presenting at EnANPAD?,” “Are you presenting any work at the Academy of Management?,” “Are you going to the Strategic Management Society?,” and “Are you going to the Academy of International Business?”. The publications submitted in congresses augmented the evaluation scores of lecturers and of programs sponsored by research-support agencies. The new century saw increasing pressure in Brazil on academics in the field of Administration to submit papers to national and, more importantly, to international journals. As a result, submission of articles to congresses lost its relevance for evaluation by development agencies and consequently for graduate programs in Administration. This occurrence risked weakening the debates crucial for the advancement of knowledge. The questions have changed, and at great speed: “How many articles in indexed journals have you published this year?,” “What is the impact factor of the journals in which you publish?,” “How many citations did your articles have?,” “What is the impact of your research on society?,” and “And for the productive sector?”.

This is not a recent discussion, and controversy surrounds the level of impact and the risks associated with assessment metrics (Garfield, 1972; Lawler, Mohrman, Mohrman, Ledford, & Cummings, 1983; Seglen, 1997). As previously discussed, there is a growing perception that research in the field of Administration will need to impact society in addition to publication in high impact journals and the quantity of citations from published work.

Research Councils UK (RCUK) defines the impact of research as “the demonstrable contribution that excellent research does to society and the economy” (Economic and Social Research Center Council, 2017). This may involve academic, economic, and social impact. It is important that research effectively contributes to improvements in the quality of life and work environment, so that public and private companies have greater socio-environmental commitment to increase the international competitiveness of Brazilian companies and create knowledge-intensive jobs with higher salaries and so on. Nowadays, we have an academia worried about publishing articles and collecting points to maintain or raise its CAPES valuation – enclosed in its “ivory towers” and little concerned about the so-called “real world.” Most leaders in the management of public, private, NGO, and startup companies neither quote nor use our research in

the domain of Administration. Training in the most advanced techniques of quantitative and qualitative research is vital, but it is the prerogative of the graduate programs in Administration to train people to render relevant research effective in theory and in practice.

NON-TRADITIONAL TEACHING: BLENDED DISCIPLINES, REAL PROBLEMS, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A graduate program in Administration should provide students with the opportunity to learn by interacting with experienced lecturers. To this end, mentoring activities are an obvious path, where the trainee accompanies experienced teachers. There is however, a growing challenge to provide graduate students with the opportunity to learn from new didactic approaches. The increasing usage of didactic approaches in the format of blended disciplines, which include Distance Learning (DL) resources, videos, films, tasks for each topic, and solid and fast feedback, can be accelerated with the participation of graduate students. There are several challenges related to the adoption of blended disciplines by teachers, which are related to (1) teaching-learning processes, (2) community concerns about the quality of these courses, and (3) technical challenges and issues (McGee & Reis, 2012; Ocak, 2011). In the Swedish graduate model, for example, PhD students are employed as teachers for the duration of their course, and this experience qualifies them for selective processes after completing their PhD degrees. Artificial intelligence to customize learning experiences should soon become readily available on a large scale, as seen by the advances of the Watson program by International Business Machines (IBM, 2017). An increasing number of graduate students should have their non-traditional teaching skills developed during the graduate period.

INTERNATIONALIZATION AND NATIONALIZATION

A relevant challenge for the graduate programs in Administration concerns not only the development of a global mindset in teachers and students, but also the development of a national attitude to raise awareness of the country’s specific issues. Two innovations – those of offering regular English courses to attract foreign students, and visiting international professors who offer new perspectives to the students – have stimulated the internationalization of graduate programs, including those of universities in the so-called

“emerging markets” (Bartell, 2003; Huang, 2007). This debate has no relevant experiences to offer about Brazilian universities having campuses in other countries despite some attempts, such as that of the USP, which recently closed its campuses in London, Boston, and Singapore due to the economic crisis affecting Brazil and the university itself. Magazines published in the English language in Brazil are also becoming a trend, despite the fragile economic situation (Alcadipani, 2017). Research projects with partners in international schools are a very suitable method of knowledge development on topics of mutual interest and also for subsequent joint publication with colleagues from other countries. Scholarships for sandwich courses are also very important in creating this global mindset.

But the issue of nationalization is also critical. Programs should encourage students to undertake studies that equip them with the skills to deal with national problems. Their students should be taught to analyze big national issues, both in terms of value creation through strategies and innovations and in terms of reducing imbalances (economic, social, and regional) in a country that still figures among the most unequal in the world. It is necessary that students and researchers are able to formulate agendas and research projects that meet not only the needs of the country but also those of Latin America without simply replicating agendas and research projects imported from developed countries. The Dinter and Minter programs promoted by CAPES, which correctly prioritize the receiving entities in the most deprived regions of the country, can be important tools for understanding and formulating public and private management solutions for major national problems.

CONCLUSION

This brief reflection is yet another invitation to the debate that consolidated solutions must be provided to the challenges faced by the graduate programs in Administration. Much of what I have addressed here comes from my own experience within the Coordination of the Graduate Programs in Administration of the University of São Paulo (the PPGA-USP, in Portuguese) over the past four years. These are the challenges that we face and must resolve with our internal and external partners. After all, in the university setting, all endeavors are the result of a collective effort.

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