The Making of a Good PhD Program: The case of Doctorate School of Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences-Lebanese University

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Outline

- Introduction
- Research Objectives
- Literature Review
- Methodology
  - Design
  - Population & Sample
  - Measurement
  - Data collection
- Results
  - Program's requirements
  - Supervisor
- PhD courses
- Satisfaction with the program
- Analysis
- Limitations
- Recommendations
- Question
Introduction

- PhD is the highest degree in academia
  - Pursuing a PhD is demanding
  - Only 1% of the population acquires a PhD
- PhD programs are important
  - Provide the market with the needed specialized personnel
- Deciding on a program, important factors
  - Acceptance rates
  - Students’ GPA
  - Research skills
  - Adequate faculty

Introduction (cont’d)

- Program assessment and evaluation is essential for improving graduate programs
- Periodical assessment is needed to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of any PhD program
  - This leads to improvement
- Some program assessments revealed common problems:
  - Inadequate facilities
  - Lack of qualified faculty
  - Inability to prepare researchers
Research Objectives

Purpose of the study
- Evaluate the status of the post graduate program at the DSLHSS at LU, as revealed by the candidates’ attitudes

The study will investigate the following questions:
- What is the status of the PhD in Education at the DSLHSS from the perspective of the candidates? That is, what are the attitudes of the graduate students towards the DSLHSS?
- Is there a difference in attitudes towards DSLHS between the genders?
- Are the PhD requirements clearly stated at the DSLHSS? Do the candidates have knowledge of these criteria?
- Does the DSLHSS possess the criteria of a good PhD program?

Literature Review

Admission criteria of major ivy league universities
- Time required for earning the degree;
- Percentage of women doctorate students in the program;
- Average number of publications per candidate;
- Cooperation between faculty and candidates in supporting research and scholarship for continued betterment of society;
- Courses designed specifically for PhD students/researcher preparing them for their dissertation;
- Comprehensive exam after completing the courses;
- Submission of a PhD proposal;
- Facilities and research methods provided for the candidates;
- Good research skills;
- Clear admission criteria
  - GPA: ≥3.5 in MA
  - Source of MA degree
  - Research and Publications
Methodology

- **Design**
  - Non-experimental approach
  - Descriptive method of analyzing data
  - Tools: questionnaire & informal group interview

- **Population and sample**
  - 30 doctorate students
    - 27% (8) males & 73% (22) females
    - 16 LU; 4 AUB; 1 LAU
    - 63% GPA $\geq 3.5$; 27%; GPA 3.0-3.5; 7% no answer
    - 53% first year; 40% second year; 7% more
    - 70% unpublished

Methodology (cont’d)

- **Measurement**
  - Questionnaire:
    - Developed & piloted & adapted
    - 22 items
    - Likert scale: 1=disagree, 2=unsure/neutral, 3=agree
  - Casual interviews

- **Data collection and analysis**
  - Questionnaire distributed during doctorate days
  - 2 sets: English & Arabic
  - Collected data analyzed using SPSS
  - Notes taken during interviews
Results

Number of publications by university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous University</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-4</th>
<th>&gt; 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAU</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LU</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program’s requirements

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Students’ Knowledge of the Program’s Requirements in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DA</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I knew what the requirements for graduation were</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew what the credit requirements were</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew what the evaluation processes were</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew how much time it takes to earn the degree</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I knew what the exit criteria were</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

- Supervisor
  - Descriptive statistics of students’ attitudes towards their supervisors in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DA</th>
<th>UN</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor is cooperative</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor supports me in doing research</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor supports me in continuing the betterment of society</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor is well-published</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor is updated with the latest research</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor prepares me for my dissertation</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- PhD Courses
  - Core required courses equip students with research skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
<th>Cumulative percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>96.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Satisfaction with the program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
<th>1st year</th>
<th>2nd year</th>
<th>&gt; 2 years</th>
<th>AUB</th>
<th>LAU</th>
<th>LU</th>
<th>Other uni</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

Clear Criteria

- Literature reveals the importance of having admission & exit criteria clearly stated
  - Issa and Abo Alma’ty (2011) & Al-Nadi (2009) concluded that it is important to have clear and transparent admission criteria
    - The accepted students should have a minimum average of 80/100.
  - The DSLHSS does follow this criterion
- Issa and Abo Alma’ty (2011) argue that for a graduate program to meet international standards, it has to clearly articulate its objectives
- DSLHSS does not have clear objectives
Analysis

- **Supervisor**
  - The data reveals that the majority of students are satisfied with their supervisors.
  - This concurs with previous studies
  - Although some of these supervisors are famous in the academic life, they are easily available for the students (Guirriero, 2002; Heck Jr., 2011)
  - Do not prepare candidates for their dissertation
    - Good program should (Al-Deek, 2009)

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Analysis

- **Evaluation Criteria:**
  - Most students have no knowledge of the evaluation criteria and process (Issa & Abo Alma’ty, 2011, Audi, 2009; Al-Deek, 2009; Al-Sharif, 2011)

- **Courses:**
  - Data concurs with previous research: courses do not prepare candidates for research (Haddad, 1999 as cited by Al-Sharif, 2011 & Al-Nadi, 2009; Issa & Abo Alma’ty, 2011)
Analysis

Advantages & Strengths

- The program produces needed graduates and “satisfies the demands of public accountability” (Biggs, 2001 as cited by Bornman, 2004).
- This fact renders the program as having achieved one of the criteria for quality assurance (Bornman, 2004).
- Another factor for quality assurance is the graduate program’s placement record (Heck Jr., 2011) - DSLHSS satisfies.
- Graduates enjoy career enhancement opportunities (Fox & Byers, 2011).
- Graduates are usually offered positions in the educational sector for their degree is classified as first level.

Limitations

Several limitations:

- Most important: need more than one source of data for evaluation to avoid bias (Bromley, 2008; Walsh et al., 2010).
- Findings cannot be generalized for it is built on one source.
- Due to time constraints, the study did not investigate:
  - The faculty’s attitude towards the program;
  - The feedback from administrators/decision makers of the program;
  - The background of the uncooperative supervisors;
  - If the reasons for dissatisfaction are the same among the candidates who come from different universities;
  - Why there are more female students: is it because male candidates are pursuing it elsewhere?
  - The availability of research facilities for students.
Recommendation

- The program should:
  - Apply the international quality assurance system (Agha et al., 2011)
  - Revise the program’s objectives to investigate (Metwali, 2012; Issa & Abo Alma’ty, 2011; Belboush, 2011)
  - Revise the curriculum and offered courses (Agha et al., 2011; Issa & Abo Alma’ty 2011; Belboush, 2011; Metwaly, 2012)
  - Support and emphasize more research instead of evaluating students’ performance through summative tests (Issa & Abo Alma’ty, 2011)
  - Unifying requirements of graduating among the different majors in the program, (Audi, 2009)

Questions
References


