

Your Turn

by Gilbert W. (Joe) Joseph

I Shortage of Ph.D.s? We're Turning Them Away

Management education is facing a severe shortage of doctorally qualified faculty. To be sure, when it comes to attracting academically qualified faculty, we are deep in a seller's market of pandemic proportions.

Like many other business schools, our school has been actively recruiting applicants for new faculty positions for our growing programs—and finding fewer qualified applicants to fill them. In our pursuit of accounting faculty, for instance, we are seeing the same trends that the American Accounting Association highlighted at its national conference. It found that applications to open accounting faculty positions peaked in 1992, with 180 resumes submitted to fill 110 open positions. In 1997, the applicant-to-position ratio evened out, with 117 resumes submitted to fill 120 open positions. In the years that followed, the bottom dropped out: Only 64 resumes were submitted to fill the 240 open positions that schools posted in 2002.

But are management education institutions truly exploring all possible solutions to the problem? I believe that the crisis is actually being exacerbated by antiquated policies still in place at many business schools. First, many schools refuse to accept part-time doctoral candidates. And, second, many schools refuse to consider hiring their own graduates to fill faculty positions. As a result, many qualified applicants are being turned away before they even come through the door.

It's not that many in the field aren't trying to address the larger issue—it's just that they're ignoring these two contributing factors. In fact, I read with interest the Doctoral Faculty Commission's 2003 report to AACSB International's Board of Directors, "Sustaining Scholarship in Business Schools." In the report, members of the Commission outline nine specific solutions to solving the faculty shortage. They recommend that schools provide post-graduate business training for doctoral faculty from other disciplines; encourage less research-intensive doctoral programs for executives; legitimize research and nonresearch dual tracks for business faculty; clarify the definition of "professionally qualified" faculty to reduce the perceived need to hire only Ph.D.-qualified faculty; initiate new funding sources to encourage institutions to sustain or increase doctoral programs; provide reputational incentives to redirect resources as investments in Ph.D. programs; encourage accreditation peer review teams to balance Ph.D. production needs with institutional priorities; promote Ph.D. programs to prospective students; and foster innovation in lower-cost education delivery methods.

While I applaud AACSB International's proactive stance and the Doctoral Faculty Commission's work, I believe that the two important alternative solutions to the shortage—accepting part-time Ph.D. students and considering home-grown graduates for faculty positions—are notable by their absence from the Commission's recommendations. They are absent because they represent a challenge to institutional mores that have long been a

barrier to change. But AACSB International could play an important role by encouraging change in the policies of those institutions offering business doctoral degrees and advocating these two alternative solutions to the doctoral shortage.

Alternative No. 1: Abandon policies that forbid part-time Ph.D. candidates.

The Commission's report indicated that reduced income was one of the most important factors in a student's decision to pursue (or not to pursue) a doctoral degree. And yet, many Ph.D. programs in business admit only full-time candidates. But by not permitting part-time Ph.D. candidates, these programs miss out on potential students in an academically and intellectually qualified pool of talent, who simply may not be able afford leaving their jobs to pursue full-time candidacy.

In my experience, part-time Ph.D. candidates can succeed in and support doctoral programs as well as those who study full-time. I myself was a part-time doctoral student, along with two of my peers. While in the program, we "part-timers" attended all seminars and guest speaker events. We were involved in all the activities expected of full-time candidates. There were only two differences. While full-time Ph.D. students took three courses, we took two (we were essentially "two-third-time" candidates). And unlike full-time students, we did not teach courses.

As I neared completion of the program, another student was accepted as a part-time candidate. Soon after, the university changed its policy, and that student was instructed to begin attending full-



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time and to cease his outside work activities. Financially, his only option was to leave the program. He was a promising candidate, lost because of a myopic policy. It was a policy established with no evidence that part-time students were somehow less worthy than full-time candidates.

We must consider that many potential Ph.D. candidates have been successful in business, government, or the military, and now desire to share their work-related knowledge with students. However, at their stage of life, they may be married and have older children. They must finance mortgages, college tuition, and perhaps even long-term care for their parents. These businesspeople cannot support their families on a graduate assistant's stipend.

As a result, most are refused entrance into doctoral programs

because universities refuse to allow their part-time participation. We can't even gather statistics on them—on their education, their income, their work experience—because they are simply turned away without consideration.

At the same time that the Commission neglects the issue of part-time Ph.D. study, it advocates doctoral programs for executives, programs that by the Commission's own admission are rare. Moreover, I believe we should not encourage Ph.D. education that de-emphasizes research, as many executive doctoral programs propose.

I suspect that the number of new faculty created by allowing part-time candidates would far exceed the number of faculty from doctoral programs for executives. Graduates from part-time Ph.D. programs would be fully research-qualified and ready for the rigors of academic study. And although part-time candidates may not teach initially, I believe there are ways for them to gain teaching experience that would allow for their working schedules.

**Alternative No. 2:
Abandon policies that prevent an institution
from hiring its own graduates.**

Many institutions that grant doctoral degrees do not hire their own graduates directly from their own Ph.D. programs. Some refuse to do so indefinitely; others require graduates to obtain considerable experience elsewhere before their applications are considered. This policy places an undue limitation on the pool of talent available for hire *and* perpetuates the belief that institutions are merely cultivating talent for the benefit of their competitors.

I have known promising individu-

als who did not apply for entry to a Ph.D. program because they knew there was no chance that they could be hired by the university in their hometowns. They knew that upon graduation they would have to displace their families to gain employment elsewhere. Not surprisingly, many chose not to pursue Ph.D. degrees at all.

Of course, I don't advocate that schools guarantee employment to their graduates. But when filling their faculty positions, schools should give their own graduates as much consideration as they give external candidates. Let each individual's merits rule the hiring decisions. Even if graduates are *not* hired, the potential for future stability could be a factor in their decision to enter a doctoral program. Policies that deny graduates that opportunity create artificial—and unnecessary—barriers.

While most of the recommendations of the Commission are sound, Ph.D.-granting institutions need to consider these two alternative solutions. They represent long-standing policies among doctoral degree-granting institutions and are significant impediments to Ph.D. production. There are few legitimate arguments for such policies—they are simply the remnants of tradition.

In my own case, I view my position as a doctorally qualified professor with pride and a touch of irony. If I had decided to pursue a Ph.D. in business even a year or two later, I, too, would have been turned away at the door. **Z**

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