Featured School:
Universidad de los Andes
School of Management, PhD in Management
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AACSB International
Universidad de los Andes School of Management, PhD in Management Program

In the early 1990s close to ten professors, all holding doctorates, envisioned creating a doctoral program in management at the Universidad de los Andes (UA) in Colombia that would contribute to the development of doctoral faculty in the country and expand its limited academic community. Compared to universities in other countries, Colombia’s universities employ only a small number of doctoral faculty; today, less than two percent of faculty in higher education hold a doctorate. With few resources available for funding, and government institutions focused on programs in the so-called STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math), implementing a PhD program in management was quite a challenge for UA, and the dream of creating a doctoral program in management did not pan out until more than a decade later. However, with the dedication of the program’s initiators this endeavor is today bringing forth a wave of changing priorities in doctoral education in management in Colombia and Latin America.

Initiation of the Program

In 1996, the UA School of Management (UA SOM) began collaboration with the Tulane Latin American Faculty Development Program\(^1\), which in its first cohort produced 13 graduates, all from UA SOM. Though a significant investment, this program doubled the number of the University’s faculty members with a doctoral degree (including the school’s former dean), building confidence at UA SOM that the school had the necessary resources to start its own doctoral program.

In 2004, the doctoral program began to take form. Initially, the school had proposed starting a new Master of Science (MSc) program in Management that would provide aspiring faculty members with additional depth of knowledge in this field. However, as stated earlier, Colombia’s lack of faculty with doctoral qualifications in management led many to believe that there was little sense in encouraging individuals who already held an MBA to pursue a MSc. Around the same time, the University’s Strategic Plan was revised to reflect the administration’s determination to mold the school into a research university. UA had two doctoral programs at the time, and appointed a vice president for research who began to allocate resources for doctoral programs. Combined with an increasingly clear need for more doctoral education
opportunities in management, these factors set the perfect stage for UA SOM to initiate its PhD in Management program in 2007. It would be the country’s second business doctoral program.

The School of Management has maintained close ties with the Tulane programs, and since 2008 developed an International Advisory Committee made up of four professors from international universities, including Dr. John Trapani the Executive Director of the Freeman School’s Goldring Institute of International Business, and two Colombians with management responsibilities in the private and public sector. The committee meets once a year to advise on the program’s development, progress, and strategy.

**Program Structure and Funding**

The program is designed for individuals who have a clear goal to develop an academic career focused on teaching and research, especially those interested in understanding the management reality of the country. Two areas of concentration, Finance and Organizational Studies, are offered. The full time program is completed in a minimum of 4.5 years and a maximum of 8 years, and includes a mandatory full time residency of a minimum of six months at a university abroad. The program is divided into three components: the first component includes 51 credits of coursework (14 courses); the second consists of comprehensive exams, the preparation of a research proposal and the compulsory six-month period at a foreign university; and the third component involves conducting field research and finishing the dissertation, based on the proposal previously approved by the student’s Dissertation Committee. The study abroad component is compulsory among all of the University’s doctoral programs, and one of the major differentiating factors of the program.

The Director of the Doctoral Program in Management, Elvira Salgado, stresses the importance of internationalizing students and immersing them within academic communities, as well as boosting students’ confidence in their foreign language skills (usually English) in an academic setting. Of the eight students in the first cohort, seven have completed their study abroad component and the experience has pleasantly surprised the school, says Salgado. Initially, the Advisory Committee voiced doubt that professors abroad would have incentives to receive students, but the results so far have been “amazing,” according to Salgado. Students have the option to go to universities with which the UA already has partnership agreements (e.g., undergraduate student exchange), or they can locate their own destinations, as long as the plan for the experience meets with the approval of the student’s dissertation chair. For example, two students recently went to a Canadian university to work with a highly regarded professor in
corporate governance whom they had contacted independently. The professor was not only receptive to the opportunity, but also helped the students to make travel and living arrangements. Students do not take courses while abroad, but rather work on their dissertation research and take part in conferences and seminars, all while staying in touch with their dissertation chair in Colombia; the aim is to use the opportunity to better understand the academic community and interact with other students and experts in their field. Salgado stresses that although the UA SOM possesses a good library with internationally renowned databases and journals, Colombia lacks a “community of academics,” particularly in management. The semester abroad is vital to enabling students, many of whom have never been abroad and lack command in their English skills, to live an international experience, grow as academic scholars, and help build international networks with other universities.

Students are also required to fulfill a two semester teaching requirement, for which they receive a salary and have the possibility for a tuition waiver funded through the office of the University’s vice president (not business school funds), if not receiving private financing. Every student teaching a course is mentored by an informal tutor who is an experienced professor; students also have access to courses from the Master’s of Education program at the University. In 2010, with the start of the third cohort, the school implemented a research assistance requirement in the Organizational Studies track. Students in this track take one less course in the first phase of the program, but must work as research assistants for the first whole year. In return, they are paid as if they were teaching a course and also receive a tuition waiver. Students in the Finance track have the option of serving as a research assistant for additional course credit.

The School of Management strives to help students fund their participation in the program, and has allotted part of its annual funds to provide financial support for PhD students. At the time of admission, the School decides how to best support the admitted applicant, based on the qualities demonstrated by the candidate. Since the initiation of the doctoral program, five of the 24 students have received government scholarships for the complete doctoral program, including tuition, board, and the semester abroad. Five have received funding by private universities where they have employment commitments upon program completion, and 14 have received partial or total funding from UA SOM. All students also have the possibility of applying for a “scholarship loan” offered by the school in which up to 80 percent of the money loaned can become a scholarship (i.e. funds that do not need to be reimbursed). If the recipient succeeds in earning the doctoral degree, 50 percent of the loan is automatically reclassified as a scholarship, and students have up to two additional years to earn “points” towards the
reclassification of as much as 30 percent of the loan through publications and attendance at international conferences.

The Program’s Obstacles and Future Goals

Many of the challenges that the program faced in its development phase continue to persist as the program, still in its early years, grows. Although much has been invested into the UA PhD in Management program and the school has made notable progress, the nation of Colombia still does not generally uphold the same level of support for a doctoral program in management compared to other fields. As Salgado notes, there are several implications of this context for a school, such as the UA SOM, with ambitions to excel as a doctoral education provider.

First, a challenge across many Latin American countries, including Colombia, relates to the historical lack of a strong value proposition for doctoral level qualifications among faculty. Without a tradition of doctoral education, the UA SOM found that not only did their recruitment efforts need to focus on articulating the importance of doctoral education in management, but also on explaining the purpose, methods, structure, and intended outcomes of a doctoral program—and how it is different from an MBA—to a population unfamiliar with the degree.

A related challenge was the lack of willingness among universities to provide financial support for professors to pursue a doctorate. The UA SOM thus took the initiative to help provide the financing for bright individuals who were unable to go abroad for a doctoral education. Not limiting its scope to Colombia, the school continuously searches for promising students in neighboring Latin American countries as well.

Student selection is largely based on finding talented individuals who show academic promise and a desire to contribute to the field. With internationalization and the creation of networks making up two large themes in the program’s mission, selecting students with adequate English language skills has become an important factor, but also remains a challenge. Although courses are delivered in Spanish and students have the option of writing their dissertation in English or Spanish, admission and program requirements are becoming more rigid in terms of English language competency (e.g. the third cohort was required to take an English exam upon admission, and attended four levels of English courses). The change has met with some criticism, as very often potential students exhibit high academic qualifications, but lack the language skills needed. Salgado, however, claims that at the doctoral level students should be expected to know English if they wish to be accepted into the program. For example, the
University’s Doctoral Colloquium, in which national and international researchers come to share their experiences and projects with students and faculty, is conducted predominantly in English. However, the school is willing to provide support for enhancing English-language proficiency among doctoral students, providing student-learning support and making English courses and resources for improvement available. Since last year, two courses have been delivered in English, and there are plans to add another.

Not surprisingly for a new program that is the first of its kind in the School, the faculty and administration have at times felt burdened by their lack of experience in running a doctoral program. Salgado describes how the designers of the program were obligated to build the program from the ground up and continue to face challenges with the ambitious undertaking of adjusting to teaching at the doctoral level. One such issue relates to the shifting from a course-oriented to a competency-oriented mindset among the current academic community—a shift that has been helped by the school’s recent pursuit (and achievement) of AACSB accreditation and the corresponding emphasis on assurance of learning. The Advisory Committee has also proven helpful in this regard—serving as a source of insights and experience, and advocating for the adjustment of courses on a regular basis in order to better achieve the competencies they hope to develop.

Finally, with such a low percentage of faculty members in Colombia who hold doctorates in management, finding employment for program graduates within the country is not expected to be a challenge. However, while the school hopes to increase the qualifications of faculty members in Colombia, it also hopes its graduates will find employment abroad in order to extend the university’s global reach and demonstrate the quality of its graduates among an international network of schools. The UA SOM further hopes to supply more business-research competent individuals to hold positions in government institutions and industry associations. Salgado argues that doing so may help the private sector to show more support for and invest in business doctoral programs, rather than maintaining that responsibility for support of such programs lies in the government and the university.

Altogether, the school has ambitious goals for the program; but like those faculty members in the early 1990s whose dream of establishing a doctoral program was fulfilled, the UA SOM’s Doctoral Program in Management seems on track to meet the high expectations it has set for itself.
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End Notes

1 For more on the Tulane Latin American Faculty Development Program, see www.aacsb.edu/resources/docto
ral/spotlights.