

Transforming Study in Residence Based on Value Constructs

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in the
Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education
to be offered at a distance by
Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University
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Study in residence has its roots in the European universities of the 1600s. The university practice was based on models established in monasteries of the early church. American universities modeled their curriculum from European counterparts. "A major purpose of the residence requirements for graduate degrees is to ensure that the student has an opportunity to benefit from the advantages of a university environment. These advantages include not only the accessibility of library, laboratory, and other physical facilities, but also the opportunity to participate in seminars and a variety of cultural activities. Equally important to the graduate student are the advantages of becoming acquainted with the faculty and other students on both a personal and a professional basis" (TAMU 1999-2000 Graduate Catalog, p. 23). "Study leading to a graduate degree involves sustained residence as well as the successful completion of course work. Residence is credited for work done on the campus of Texas Tech University and for certain types of courses (theses, field courses, practicums, internships, individual study, or any other such course) when offered by Texas Tech faculty at a place and under circumstances specifically established by the University in advance of the offering of the course" (TTU 1998-99 Graduate School Catalog, p. 29).

McFarland (1996) examined existing requirements at 17 universities in the 11 states accountable to the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The literature review and examination of graduate catalogs found no consensus with regard to the number of residence credits, length of time of on-campus presence, or the type of classes which satisfy the residence requirement, nor did the catalogues discuss the behaviors and experiences expected during residence when specifically addressing residence requirements.

Today, doctoral degree programs anchor the practice of study in residence in five value constructs: (1) immersion in advanced study and inquiry, (2) interaction with faculty members and peers, (3) access to the educational resources of the university, (4) interchange of knowledge with the academic community, and (5) broadening of educational and cultural perspectives. Traditional doctoral degree programs delegate authority to the graduate advisory faculty committee to satisfy the spirit of residence. These traditional doctoral degree programs often require two consecutive semesters of full-time course work on a campus to operationalize the concept of residence.

The Joint Texas A&M University-Texas Tech University Graduate Faculty in Agricultural Education recognizes and values each of the attributes of traditional residence. However, distance education methodologies and digital technologies have made significant advances within the past decade, and promise to continue to advance, with the result that the spirit of residence can be achieved in "at a distance" settings as occurs now through "on-campus" residence.

How is this happening? Seagren and Watwood (1997) have pointed out that "the trend toward electronically distributed education will make college a network of resources, rather than a place, while the widespread use of new technologies can be expected to improve the quality of instruction and alter the roles and responsibilities of faculty. Major features of this form of distributed education include: (1) learning is based on dialogue in virtual interactive groups; (2) participants can access the group at their own convenience; (3) responses, comments, and arguments are written without the pressure of instant response; (4) collaboration is greatly improved over classroom-based instruction, since all students must participate; (5) poor student performance cannot be disguised, and (6) problems of the classroom approach, such as gender dominance issues, minority barriers, and physical disadvantages, are also eliminated."

With these benefits of applying educational technology, the Joint Faculty choose to use strategies that achieve these value constructs while treating time issues (calendar) and location issues (geography) as asynchronous variables. Our collective vision is to (1) promote intellectual engagement, (2) enhance academic scholarship, and (3) provide educational access while broadening educational and cultural perspectives and doing so in a manner to satisfy the spirit of residence.

In doing so, we propose to rely heavily on the use of cohort groups to accomplish some of the benefits traditionally associated with on-campus residence. Dorn and Papalewis (1997) concluded that "the practice of using mentor students from other cohorts, both in the university and the community, enhances the students' exposure to learning and provides much needed support to members trying to work full-time while earning their doctorates. The interaction between students and their cohort mentors facilitates more productive movement between students, the university, and the global marketplace. Data from a survey of 108 doctoral students from eight universities suggest that group cohesiveness and persistence to the degree are significantly correlated."

We will speak to each of the five value constructs and discuss strategies that will be employed and commitments that will be made.

Immersion in advanced study and inquiry.

Prior to admission to the cohort, each student will develop a letter of commitment with his/her employer that acknowledges the time demands of the degree program and the need for systematic intellectual development and engagement.

The course of study provides for continuous enrollment over the 64-semester hour program to be delivered over a four-year calendar. Graduate students will enter and exit the program as a cohort. The knowledge bases, e.g., "Planning and Needs Assessment," and contextual settings, e.g., "Extension Education," of the discipline will be identified early in the program of study, and each graduate student will identify both a primary knowledge base and a primary context as a part of systematic inquiry. This inquiry will be transformed into a series of research questions, learner-centered projects, and ultimately, into a dissertation or record of study.

Resources available for delivery at a distance through the libraries of both universities will be used to make it possible for students to be immersed in their respective inquiries. Also, the four face-to-face contacts by faculty with cohorts in seminars of three to five days duration built into the degree program will contribute to this immersion in advanced study.

In the operational guidelines of the Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education, the Joint Faculty agrees to: (1) assume responsibility for and exercise oversight of the curriculum and

instruction, (2) ensure both the rigor of the degree program and the quality of instruction, (3) assess student capability to succeed in a distance education program and apply this information to admission policies and decisions, (4) evaluate the educational effectiveness of the program and progress of students, including learning outcomes, student retention, and student satisfaction, and do so comparing achievements of at-a-distance students with achievements of on-campus resident students, (5) ensure the integrity of student work and the credibility of the credits awarded, and (6) evaluate continuously the progress and intellectual development of each student.

Interaction with faculty members and peers.

Oblinger and Maruyama (1996) reported that computing networks expand options for interaction among faculty and students and that external experts are more easily accessed. Oblinger and Maruyama observed that the opportunity for faculty to individualize and personalize contact with students is noticeably increased when compared to traditional doctoral programs. Kochery (1997) noted that "by creating an environment that advocates peer interactions, social support, and interpersonal communications, cooperative learning models can help attain the sense of a learning community which is frequently lacking in distance education experiences."

Presently, it is proposed that a maximum of 30 students be selected per cohort with subgroups consisting of three to six individuals. Miller and Webster (1997) found that students were positive about experiences aimed at interaction between learner and instructor. Learners in asynchronous settings did not consider that learning individually was a hindrance to their education; however, learners in synchronous settings indicated a dislike for being the lonely learner at a particular learning site. Upon admission, each student will participate in a specific work group that consolidates around one of five knowledge bases. Also, each student will participate in a different work group that consolidates around one of six contextual applications. The graduate advisor, co-advisor, and the graduate advisory committee will be selected, in part, based on this common line of inquiry. These groups will undertake scholarly initiatives and document results of learning and behaviors that advance professional development.

Appropriate educational technologies will be used to engage the student systematically with the graduate faculty, major advisor, graduate program committee, and peers. Engagement will be monitored and regularly discussed between the student and advisor as

well as periodically discussed with the graduate program committee via TTVN. Hardwick (1997) increased personal interaction with and among students and faculty when using two-way audio and visual interaction. In addition to regular meetings with their subgroups, students will be required to attend a minimum of four seminars three to five days in length with the entire cohort and the joint faculty participating. The seminars will alternate between Lubbock and College Station campuses or other appropriate locations.

Dorn and Papalewis (1997) reported that 50 percent of all doctoral students fail to complete their programs. Group dynamic tools that aid in maintaining persistence include using mentor students from other cohorts in the university and community. These interactions facilitate more productive movement between students, the university, and the global marketplace. Data suggest that group cohesiveness and persistence to the degree are significantly correlated. When deemed necessary by the graduate committee, students will make on-campus visits for faculty/student discussions.

In the operational guidelines of the Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education, the Joint Faculty agrees to: (1) provide timely and appropriate interaction between students and faculty, and among students, (2) provide appropriate training in methods and technologies for interaction for faculty who teach and for students who learn at a distance, (3) encourage interactive teaching and learning that fosters critical dialogue, integrative learning, mentoring, cooperative peer learning, and group out-of-class activities, (4) use e-mail or Web-based sites to inform students about opportunities for interaction in person-to-person or in distance settings and (5) monitor synchronous and asynchronous interactions between faculty and students to assess the total duration and "systemacy" (spacing, continuity, relationship, etc.) of engagement.

Access to the educational resources of the university.

Access to academic resources will be provided by a variety of means at both institutions. As stated previously, Seagren and Watwood (1997) foresee that the trend toward electronically distributed education will make college a network of resources, rather than a place, while the widespread use of new technologies can be expected to improve the quality of instruction and alter the roles and responsibilities of faculty. The Texas A&M University System has joined with the University of Texas System and Texas Tech University to establish WAN networks. This means that it will be possible to increase use of interactive video,

negotiate contracts for services, provide library services for all students in the program, and provide a 56K dial-in modem pool. Schall (1998) found that web software that includes telecommunications, e-mail, student-to-student interaction, submission of assignments, timely instructor feedback, and the transfer of files and multimedia documents had positive influence on instruction. Because of the availability of these services and the increasing effectiveness of digital technology (Negroponte, 1995; Oblinger & Maruyama, 1996; Tapscott, 1996; Twigg, 1996), students will access the resources of the universities without having to be present physically on campus.

To reinforce these points, Negroponte (1995) has predicted that digital technology will continue its rapid ascent. Microprocessor performance has been increasing at a relatively constant rate, doubling approximately every 18 months. This trend is persistent and expected to continue. Its impact, however, is a perceived time compression that changes models for business, education, and the home. Digital technologies are increasingly expected to penetrate all aspects of education and training. Conservative estimates put the number of today's Internet users at around 1 billion people worldwide, and network traffic has exceeded telephone traffic.

In the operational guidelines of the Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education, the Joint Faculty agrees to: (1) ensure that the technology used is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the program and the learning experience, (2) ensure the currency of materials, programs, and courses, (3) provide appropriate faculty support services, including a stable on-site coordinator who is specifically responsible for coordination of course delivery, (4) ensure that students have access to and can effectively use appropriate library resources, (5) encourage the university libraries to play an active role in the development of policies, resources, services, and personnel to support distance learners, (6) provide access through 1-800 numbers for library services, (7) provide appropriate facilities and equipment for the courses and program, (8) monitor whether students make appropriate use of learning resources, (9) ensure that long range budgeting and policy development reflects the facilities, staffing, equipment, and other resource needs essential to an effective distance education program, (10) develop web-based educational materials using a faculty team approach, and (11) provide interactive delivery systems that include distance registration, access to library holdings, video use, electronic-mail accounts, delivery of course files and documents, and facsimile access.

Interchange of knowledge with the academic community.

International Data Corporation reported that almost one million students have taken a distance course, largely on-line, and they forecast the number to double by 2002 (Gordon, 1999).

Students have ready access to several journals of the discipline, some of which are available only on-line, and to the ListServ of the professional society. These technologies position the graduate student directly in the center of the academic and professional issues of the day.

Because of networking technologies now available, course instructors and major advisors will use resource people from locations both on and off-campus to provide information to students in at-a-distance locations as is currently done for on-campus students.

Graduate students will be expected to participate in the broader academic community, including regional and national research conferences. For example, the Western Region Agricultural Education Research Conference is scheduled in Las Cruces, New Mexico in 2000, the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists meetings are scheduled for Fort Worth in 2001, and the National Agricultural Education Research Conference will be held in San Diego in 2000. Students engaged in both traditional campus-based and distance-delivered graduate programs will be encouraged to submit research and actively participate.

In the operational guidelines of the Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education, the Joint Faculty agrees to: (1) provide for timely and appropriate interaction between students, faculty, and the broader academic community, (2) ensure broad access to the knowledge base of the discipline, (3) help students prepare summary reports of research on dissertation/record of study topics to be published and disseminated as departmental information bulletins and to prepare articles and papers for publication as appropriate, (4) invite co-authorship of research on mutual interest areas, and (5) engage students in state, regional, and national meetings of the profession.

Broadening educational and cultural perspectives.

The very nature of the core courses included in the degree program for at-a-distance students means that their educational and cultural

perspectives will be broadened, just as occurs with students taking on-campus courses. Examples of specific courses in the program that will expand cultural and educational perspectives of students are 615/5306, History, Philosophy and Policies of Agricultural Education; 640/5307, Methods of Technological Change; 610, Principles of Adult Education; 601/5308, Advanced Methods in Agricultural Education; 5305, Program Planning in Agricultural and Extension Education; and at least one doctoral seminar.

Enrollment forecasts, 1997-2010, show enrollment in public universities to increase through 2010 with the ethnic mix of students enrolled in Texas programs of higher education to approximate the ethnic mix for the general population of Texans in the same age range. Presently, there are 87 nominated students who span the breadth of Texas. For example, 12 students have been nominated and indicated an interest from the El Paso/Ft. Stockton area, nine from the Amarillo region, six from the Vernon area, and four from the Corpus Christi area, four rather diverse areas in terms of context and experience that would be involved in the program. Thus, the aggregation of cohorts from diverse geographic and cultural experiences, with the interactions among them that occur, will result in broadened educational and cultural perspectives being acquired by students.

Internet and worldwide web are integral tools for the graduate student. Using e-mail and threaded discussion groups, students and professors regularly communicate about theory and practice. Dooley (1999) noted that the communication through threaded discussion groups is often more thoughtful and rigorous than in traditional class discussion. Dooley inferred that because the discussion is asynchronous, students often seek out and use supporting literature and data to support their analyses and conclusions in their responses to student and faculty questions, thus broadening their perspectives. In short, the real world in which the students live, work, and study will be used to broaden their educational and cultural perspectives, something that sometimes is difficult to accomplish in residence settings.

In the operational guidelines of the Joint Doctor of Education Degree in Agricultural Education, the Joint Faculty agrees to: (1) build different exercises, strategy papers, analyses of case studies, and examinations that emphasize broadened educational and cultural perspectives into requirements for satisfactory completion of courses, (2) use the face-to-face seminars as one vehicle for engaging in cultural experiences, (3) make known to the cohorts information about educational and

cultural events in the areas of respective cohorts and encourage the members of each cohort to participate in those events, (4) encourage students to participate in cultural experiences provided via the world-wide-web and other distance technologies such as www.wau.nl or other international web sites, and (5) encourage learners to explore and share the diversity of their communities, including the cultural, ethnic, social, and intellectual dimensions of diversity, through case studies and other activities in the program.

This is the collective work of the Joint Doctoral Faculty in Agricultural Education. For further information, contact Glen Shinn at gshinn@tamu.edu.

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