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COLLABORATIVE DOCTORAL PROGRAMS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A Status Report

Jack McKay and Marilyn Grady

Introduction

The eternal optimist may be the one who believes in a genuine lasting relationship between two academic departments at different universities. The challenges presented by skeptics, strawmen, and academic elitists often overwhelm the belief in collaboration. Traditional beliefs run counter to the spirit and benefits of collaboration in academia. For example, Johnson (1988) claims that the most pervasive reason why collaborative arrangements do not solve many problems in higher education is that competition is not only condoned, but rewarded and encouraged.

The first purpose of this paper is to identify the problems and opportunities of collaborative programs in higher education. The second purpose is to summarize, nationally, the status of collaborative doctoral programs in educational administration. The third purpose is to describe a collaborative doctoral program between two departments of educational administration.

A collaborative doctoral program is one that involves faculty from two or more autonomous departments on different campuses mutually providing access to the same doctoral degree.

Background

Universities foster competitiveness and learn to live with ruthless competition for faculty members, students, and federal, state, and private dollars. One reason why collaboration in higher education has not flourished is that it runs counter to the grain of institutional autonomy.

Autonomy is the hallmark of university life, from the faculty member to the institutional level. Often, those who believe in inter-university collaboration are seen as ones who are undermining institutional and academic independence. However, Grupe (1972) claimed that collaboration strengthens autonomy by avoiding the great threat of co-optation.

Besides the possible loss of autonomy, Kreplin and Bolce (1973) and Martin (1981) list the following deterrents to collaboration: (a) the fear of lost resources, (b) prohibitive decision-making procedures, (c) support of a weak program, (d) lack of meaningful rewards for faculty, (e) undue emphasis on reducing costs, and (f) mismatching of membership and mission.

Finally, Johnson (1988) mentions the "strawmen" of collaborative intercollegiate activities. Inertia is one strawman. Why change an advanced degree program if it has been successful in the past? The second strawman is tokenism. Collaboration is much easier when dealing with administrative than with academic activities. The third strawman is turf. Turf may be geographical areas of a state or a claim to have a responsibility to provide a certain program to a group of students.

Interest in Collaboration

The financial problems facing higher education have compelled college and university administrators and faculty to search for new solutions. The desire to expand educational opportunity while enriching the meaning of higher learning experiences for students has also led many educators to fix on collaboration as a possible solution.

Factors of Successful Intercollegiate Collaboratives

Mission

Factors, other than merely wanting to collaborate, are critical to sustaining a relationship between two organizations. Schlechty and Whitford's (1988) summary of school-university collaboration suggests a necessary state beyond recognition in a symbiotic partnership. Something resembling a new, organic, relationship combining features of the other organisms (institutions) must result from the collaboration. In almost every successful collaborative venture there has been a search for a mission specific enough to bind participants in a common enterprise, but general enough to allow for individuality and creativity. The departments, as the units of change, provide the settings where the potential for contributions from all actors, especially in the decision-making process, are the critical part of a collaborative venture.

Trust

The tensions that emerge early in collaborative relationships are more a question of trust than of solving tough problems of mutual interest. Lack of initial trust stems in part from the unfamiliar relationships and unknown individual and group goals. What is to be gained? What is to be given up? What turf, if any, will be lost or gained? Such questions do not always remain below the surface. The way these questions sometimes manifest themselves does not immediately contribute to trust (Sirotnik and Goodlad 1988).

Institutional Integrity

Significant human progress can be traced repeatedly to the interpenetrating of two cultures, one with the other. If one culture completely loses its identity, the productive tension between interacting cultures is lost (McNeill, 1986). There is importance in maintaining differences among institutions that join in a collaborative effort. There is little gained if the characteristics of one mirrors those of the other. The differences must be appreciated by the partners even though those differences produce tensions.

The classic problems of affecting change and the unique manifestations of those problems are the primary purposes of this paper. The challenge is getting beyond simply conducting old programs better. It is taking advantage of the opportunities to create a more efficient and effective program for school leaders.

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History of Collaboration in Higher Education

During times of relatively high student enrollment, collaboration tends to grow. Two primary doctrines of collaboration between institutions were developed by Patterson (1974). The first doctrine claims that the academic program can be substantially enriched and add to the diversity of ideas. In practice, however, when it comes to academic matters, the faculty, no matter how radical they may be in social and political protest, turn out to be conservative in protecting what they regard as their vested institutional interests. Institutional territoriality tends to prevail, making those concerned appear more willing to adhere to what President John Silber of Boston University calls the "principle of redundancy" than to the idea of planned complementarity (Patterson, 1974, p. 4).

The second doctrine relates to economic gains. Economic gains through collaboration turn out to be a matter of shadow rather than substance, although the doctrine of economy seems to have self-evident validity to many observers. The Carnegie Commission notes that a good many of the consortia are paper arrangements with little relationship to improved utilization of resources. Patterson (1974) concluded that there was serious resistance in colleges and universities to any departure from the traditional goal of independent development of each institution.

In summary, collaborative programs in higher education have a mixed record. Preservation of autonomy, bureaucracy, and strawmen contributes to skepticism. The characteristics of successful collaboratives have a mission, maintain flexibility, and are sustained because of something more than a mere desire to work together.

Research questions

On the basis of the review of related literature, the following questions emerged:

1. What were the perceived benefits and issues that initiated the proposed collaborative degree program?
2. Who were the initiators of the collaborative degree programs?
3. What were the disruptive aspects of the planning for the collaborative doctoral programs?
4. How did the change process impact the participants?
5. What was the planning process?

Methodology

Based on the literature related to change and collaborative programs in higher education, the authors conducted two surveys: one on a national scale and one of two departments involved in planning a collaborative doctoral degree program in educational administration.

The first study was a national survey of existing collaborative programs at universities that offer doctoral programs in educational administration. The study of collaborative doctoral degree programs was conducted by telephone interviews and follow-up mailings. The institutions selected for the telephone interviews and mailing were identified using the following criteria:

(1) Doctoral degree programs in educational administration
(2) Listed in the *1991–92 Educational Administration Directory*, 10th Edition, by H. Edward Lilley, West Virginia University.
(3) Currently or had been involved in planning a collaborative doctoral degree program.

The demographic characteristics of the educational administration departments were obtained from the Educational Administration Directory, 10th Edition. The national survey of institutions was conducted during the spring and summer of 1992.

The second study was a survey of two departments involved in planning a collaborative doctoral degree program in educational administration. Information was obtained through interviews using a 16 item questionnaire.

Findings: The National Study

Background

Of the 336 departments of educational administration listed in Lilley's Directory, there are 166 departments that offer a doctoral degree program in educational administration. The average size of doctoral degree granting departments is 7.38 full-time equivalent faculty. Departments range in size from one to 18 faculty members. The male–female ratio is approximately 4.1 to 1. (See Table 1).

The 166 doctoral granting departments were contacted about their involvement in collaborative doctoral programs. Twenty-five collaborative doctoral programs were identified. Interviews were conducted with chairs or faculty members of 14 collaborative doctoral programs that either existed or were at one time proposed for formal adoption. Thirteen of the 14 collaborative doctoral programs reviewed were between two or more public universities. One proposed collaborative degree program was between a public and a private university.

Representatives from each of the departments of educational administration were asked a series of questions about the collaborative programs. The first research question was to identify the perceived benefits and issues that initiated the proposed collaborative degree program.

Table 1. Characteristics of Departments of Educational Administration Offering the Doctoral Degrees

Departments with Educational Administration Programs	Departments Ed.D. or Ph.D. Programs	Full Professors	Associate or Assistant Professors	Male/ Female	Range in Department Size
Departments with Doctoral Programs	166 Range 1 to 18	604	621	984/241	
Average Range		3.64	3.74	4.08/1	1 to 18
Total Department	7.38				

Source: 1991–92 *Educational Administration Directory*, 10th Edition, by H. Edward Lilley, West Virginia University.

Benefits of the Collaborative Doctorate

Proximity to the doctoral program, particularly for students from underrepresented groups, was the primary motive for developing a collaborative degree program. In one-half of the collaborative programs, there was no doctoral program in school administration in the area before the start of the collaborative program.

Collegiality was most often mentioned as the primary benefit for faculty. Other benefits of collaboration included opportunities to be involved in reviewing and revising programs, having a wider source of ideas, and working on collaborative research projects. Faculty from established doctoral programs indicated that they had more highly qualified students making application for the program because of the collaboration.

Initiators of the Collaborative Program

The second research question related to the initiators of the collaborative degree program. Of the 14 collaboratives, eight were initiated by department faculty and chairs who already had the doctorate. Two faculty members indicated that the collaborative activity was mandated by the board of regents or the state's coordinating commission for higher education.

Disruptive Aspects

The third research question related to the planning for the collaborative doctoral program. In ten collaborative programs, faculty and chairs indicated that there were no major disruptive aspects to the collaborative degree program. This point was emphasized by representatives of departments that had the original doctoral programs. Only three of the 14 programs reviewed had faculty comment about such things as increased advising, inconvenience of teaching on the other campus, or the loss of faculty and departmental autonomy.

Change Process

The fourth research question related to the change process and impact on the participants. Of the 14 collaborative programs studied, five underwent major changes in the degree program. Changes in curriculum were undertaken in two of the 14 programs. Five departments that had established doctorate programs indicated that the new collaborative degree program created a source of new students, nurtured stronger bonds between faculty of the two departments, and introduced ideas for new courses and program content.

Planning Process

The fifth research question related to the approval process. The collaborative doctoral degree programs reviewed were between two and 18 years in existence. Twelve of the 14 collaborative degree programs were formally approved by a state post-secondary commission. The state post-secondary commission and the regional accreditation association were the last organizations in a series of approval steps that involved campus and university-level faculty committees, administrators, and governing boards on both campuses. The approval process took between one and three years of planning before final approval.

Summary

Balancing the successes of the 14 collaborative doctoral programs in educational administration are the reports of the unsuccessful attempts and lost opportunities. Interviews and survey responses indicated that an unclear mission, mistrust, and the lack of a genuine integration of existing program elements into the new collaborative doctoral program all contributed to the demise of good intentions.

An analysis of the responses from faculty in unsuccessful collaborative efforts demonstrated a lack of balance between the two or more departments of such intangibles as political influence and motivation to do scholarly research and writing. Even though there might have been agreement on the mission being more than mere collaboration, there was the absence of genuine collegiality between the two groups of faculty.

An Example of Collaboration

Background

As an example of collaboration between departments of educational administration, a case study of two departments currently involved in sustaining a collaborative doctoral program follows. Both are part of a state university system. One department is part of a land grant university of 23,000 students. The nine member department of educational administration at the land grant university has a reputation of teaching, scholarship, and service that was established over a period of 50 years.

The other department of educational administration, with six members, is part of an urban university of 18,000 students. For the past 15 years, some students in doctoral programs at the land grant institution take graduate level courses and have faculty at the urban university chair or serve on their dissertation committees.

Because of an increase in interest by area public school personnel, civic leaders, and university faculty, the idea of students being able to obtain a doctorate by attending the urban campus became a priority for university administrators and faculty in 1989. In early 1990, university administrators provided guidelines for faculty to follow in developing a doctoral-level collaborative program in school leadership between the two universities. The collaborative degree proposal developed jointly the faculty of the two departments was submitted for faculty, administration, regents' and the state's postsecondary commission approval in October 1992.

To understand the development of the collaborative doctoral degree program, interviews were held with faculty directly involved in the planning process. Following is a summary of the findings of the faculty interviews.

Disruptive Aspects

Eight of the 15 faculty members from both campuses felt that the land grant university would not benefit from involvement in the collaborative degree program because of the possible loss of students, the possible increase in dissertation advising responsibilities, the loss of research time, and the loss of departmental autonomy. These responses were consistent with the literature (Johnson, 1988; Kreplin and Bolce, 1973; and Martin, 1981) regarding "turf, trust, and tradition."

Initiators of the Collaborative Degree

Twelve of the 15 faculty members on both campuses believed that the collaborative doctoral program would primarily benefit students in the metropolitan area of the state. All 15 faculty members indicated that the status of the department on the urban campus would benefit from approval of the collaborative degree proposal. All faculty members felt that students would benefit by being exposed to a greater number of faculty members with differing views. Ten faculty members indicated that students and faculty would also benefit by associating periodically with fellow students and faculty members from the other campus.

Interestingly, during the time of major financial cuts in higher education, some faculty members felt that the collaborative degree program would protect the two departments from

future reductions of faculty or support services. As one faculty member remarked, "The biggest gain may be the continued support of the department's budget and faculty lines."

Planning Process

As in most major changes, certain individuals play key roles in the eventual acceptance of a new proposal. Faculty members indicated that members of the board of regents, the president's staff, the chancellors, and deans, and the chair of the department with the established doctoral program were the most influential in developing a tone for collaborating planning of the proposed program.

From the perspective of the chairs, reflecting back on the planning process, the most crucial factor was the willingness of the faculty to work together. Other significant reasons were (a) faculty turnover resulting in a "critical mass" of new faculty in both departments, (b) reorganization of departmental structure at the land grant institution, (c) the decision to expand an existing doctoral program from one to two sites instead of creating a new program, and (d) labeling the proposal as a "joint doctoral program" all contributed to a successful start.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature, results of the national study, and interviews with faculty indicate that a collaborative relationship between two academic units in higher education, is at best, a fragile relationship. When autonomy and independence are highly valued, the odds of a sustained relationship are constantly challenged.

Benefits of the Collaborative Program

Providing a doctoral program within proximity to students was the primary factor in approving collaborative doctoral degree programs in educational administration. Tangential to improved student access to a doctoral degree program were benefits such a collaborative research, expanded source of qualified applicants, and greater utilization of faculty expertise. The benefits of collaboration and economy, outlined by Patterson, were outweighed by a commitment by faculty to make the collaborative work. Results from the national study indicate that out of the 14 programs reviewed, only three had been substantially changed because of being involved in the collaborative relationship. This small number supports the premise that genuine collaboration is sustained when change takes place in both departments.

Initiators of the Collaborative Program

For a collaborative degree program, at least in educational administration to be successful, it had to have the overt support of the regents and administrators in the beginning stages of development. Even with the overt administrative and regent level support, the major factor in sustaining the collaborative nature of the program was the relatively high level of trust and collegiality between the groups of faculty.

External forces were a major contributor to the initial push for the two faculty groups to cooperate, but the sustained level of trust among the faculty was crucial to a lasting program. In both the national and current examples, the need to offer the doctoral program where the students lived and worked was the primary factor for the change in how and where the collaborative doctoral degree would be offered.

Disruptive Aspects

Faculty members interviewed in both the national and current examples indicate that there was apprehension about increased advising and travel, along with a loss of departmental autonomy.

Change Process

In the national and current examples, there was a consistent theme that both departments had something to gain by working together. The literature indicates that there must be something to be gained by participants before change can be sustained (Schlechty and Whitford 1988). In this paper, one could speculate that the department with the established doctoral program needed access to more students. The department without the doctorate wants status and credibility. This was clearer when collaborative degree programs were between "land grant" universities in less populated regions and "urban" universities in major population centers.

There were a number of factors that were anticipated to be major roadblocks: fear of sharing governance, suspicion of faculty competence and program quality, less time available for research and writing, and an imbalance of political influence and status. These factors have not developed.

Recommendations

The literature, the findings of a national survey of collaborative programs in educational administration, and a report of a current example of the development of a collaborative degree program result in five recommendations. There needs to be:

1. A goal, mission, or purpose for the collaboration that is greater than just a willingness to collaborate.
2. A fundamental change in the programs of both departments that makes the collaborative doctoral degree better than the previously existing doctoral program.
3. Support for the collaborative degree program during the approval process from administrators and governing boards.
4. Faculty willing to devote the time and effort to become directly involved in the proposal and approval processes.
5. Openness and honesty in dealing with the potentially disruptive or negative factors involved in changing an established doctoral program.
6. Discussion about the implications for individual and departmental independence and autonomy.

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