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Socioacademic Communities of Scholarship: Adult Education Journal Editorship and Graduate Assistantships

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Abstract: This study sought to determine the perceptions of graduate students who serve as editorial assistants to understand how their experiences within this socioacademic community of scholarship has assisted their professional development as emerging scholars in the field of adult and continuing education.

Currently, the field of adult and continuing education has multiple journals wherein individuals can publish articles that address issues of significance to scholars, practitioners, and adult learners. For many of these journals, graduate students are situated in a socioacademic community of scholarship in that these graduate students serve as editorial assistants and assist the editors with the many tasks involved in the journal editorship process. However, the experiences of graduate students who serve as editorial assistants for adult and continuing education journals have been understudied.

Socioacademic Communities of Practice

This research study was theoretically framed by communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and conceptually influenced by socioacademic communities as described by Rodriguez and Pepe (2008). Within the context of graduate education, the community of practice is socioacademic as it consists of instructors, learners, learning and educational resources, and other contextual influences that contribute on the learning and engagement of the participants. For this study, the editorial assistants as learners are considered members of a “socioacademic community” which reflect values, behaviors, and attitudes. Rodriguez and Pepe (2008) define socioacademic communities as “the social and academic groupings of their constituent members” wherein these specific groupings are “essentially made up of scholars, the various socioacademic characteristics of these scholars can be regarded as parallel, socioacademic communities” (p. 3). For this reason, editorial assistants of scholarly journals are members of the same structural community—the field of adult and community education—even though they may differ with regard to the specific aim and scope of the journal and academic affiliation. Taking this one step further, the term *socioacademic communities of scholarship* is most appropriate for this study and I define it as a social and academic group of individuals who engage on an ongoing basis in the common endeavor for scholarly publications and presentations.

Methodology

Prior to initiating data collection, this study was approved by the IRB at Texas State University-San Marcos. I identified eleven journals within the field and an electronic all for participation went to 15 current or former editorial assistants (synonymously titled managing editors). Six editorial assistants affiliated with four journals responded through their written responses to a 17-item questionnaire, which was designed to collect qualitative data regarding their decision to serve as editorial assistants, the types of interaction with their editorial staff, and how their development as a scholar and professional has been influenced by them serving as editorial assistants. To maintain the anonymity of these editorial assistants, pseudonyms are used and their journal affiliation will not be disclosed throughout any associated

presentations of this study. I first read the data provided from each questionnaire per participant, and then read through all of the responses per each questionnaire item. As a large portion of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, a cross-analysis was then chosen to group answers to questions in my efforts to analyze the perspectives across various topics (Patton, 2002). Data codes were noted in the margins and subsequently compiled into categories. From those categories, the data was then reassembled into two themes: *Expectation* and *Reality*.

Discussion of Findings

All participants shared that their desire to serve as an editorial assistant was because they saw it as an opportunity for networking, strengthening their curriculum vitae, and staying current with scholarship in the field of adult and continuing education. Some mentioned serving in this capacity was most beneficial as it allowed them to hold an assistantship and work on campus. With regard to scholarly and professional development, some editorial assistants had certain expectations that did not always come to fruition. For example, Bianca shared, “I hoped that I would improve my own writing skills and make connections.” On the other hand, she also expressed, “While I had hoped I would have an opportunity to learn more about editing and writing, I actually spent most of my time emailing.” Similarly, Regina mentioned,

The other thing is that I wish I had thought more about how my work on the journal would impact my scholarly writing. I could not submit works to the journal I was working on for obvious conflict of interest reasons. But, my work on the journal also took up my entire time to write for other publications.

Nevertheless, Michelle believed serving as an editorial assistant has been very beneficial during her doctoral pursuit as she shared,

Just that it [serving as an editorial assistant] was one of those things that was never on my radar until I got involved doing it and that I would consider the opportunity to be an editorial assistant one of the highlights of my doctoral education because it has helped me broaden out my interests and network.

Overall, the participants appreciated the opportunity to serve as editorial assistants and expressed interests in serving as reviewers or editors for journals in the field of adult and continuing education in the future.

Implications for Research

The intent of this research project was to contribute to the scholarship and discussion of socioacademic communities of scholarship with regard to the experiences of graduate students serving as editorial assistants. It is hope that these findings serve as a catalyst for further exploration of socioacademic communities of scholarship which is critical to the ever extending scholarly genealogy of adult and continuing education.

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