

Reframing Doctoral Programs: A Program of Human Inquiry for Doctoral Students and Faculty Advisors

R. Neal Shambaugh

ABSTRACT: The Program of Human Inquiry is proposed as a structure to support scholarly inquiry by graduate students and faculty advisors. The Program provides a foundation that acknowledges human experiences and connects them to program aims in ways that do not limit student and faculty options. It promotes communication among student, committee members, and committee chair, as well as dialogue with oneself. It consists of four components. The first component is an acknowledgment of what one brings to graduate studies. The second component includes a Plan of Study, a summary of coursework, field experiences, formal exam dates, and residency. A third component records rigorous, but negotiated, "avenues of inquiry" including coursework, readings, research, and conferences. Finally, the Program encourages an ongoing discussion of values and recording of appropriate experiences. This proposal will interest students who wish to get the most out of their graduate experience and faculty who desire to continually re-examine their advising, their graduate program, and their own learning.

The thesis of this proposal is that graduate programs structured along lines of competencies do not fully support the human nature of scholarly inquiry. A doctoral preparation program cannot be transformed along human lines unless the members of the discipline acknowledge the full nature of what it means to *be* human in the discipline. If the human nature of inquiry is not valued, then programs will not structurally support it; and students will not see it modeled in the program's culture. This conceptual proposal adopts a pragmatic perspective to re-frame doctoral preparation as human inquiry and introduces a Program of Human Inquiry as a structured means for students and advisors to support this endeavor.

Conceptual Perspective

The essence of doctoral preparation is scholarly inquiry. The dominant perspective on inquiry regards reason as sufficient for understanding

R. Neal Shambaugh is an Assistant Professor of Instructional Design and Technology at West Virginia University. He received a B.S. in Management Science, M.A., and Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. His research interests include instructional design pedagogy, the use of instructional technology, and the design of graduate programs.

and the scientific method as the means to ensure proof of this understanding (Descartes, 1968). From this positivist perspective knowledge accumulates from a universal foundation of objective truth claims. Technical rationality entices one to explain, predict, and control our world to ultimately achieve harmony. This rational knowledge, dispensed from authority, places theory over practice (Johnson, 1993). Practice is based on the application of objective theories and techniques. Joining the dichotomies of means-end and research-practice is the dichotomy of knowing and doing. Action is a test of technical decisions (Schön, 1987), and the reality of truth is tested against facts. Professional competence in this perspective “consists of theories and techniques derived from systematic, preferably scientific research to the solution of the instrumental problems of the practice” (Schön, 1987, p. 33).

The perspective that supports this proposal is a pragmatic one, “becoming more experienced” (Dewey, 1958; Gadamer, 1989), a perspective that regards ourselves as not only what we can do, but what we use and think. It also assumes that particular “values, norms, and practices make up our view of what it is to be” (Coyne, 1995, p. 6). There cannot be just one way of knowing the world; rather, there are, infinite ways of knowing. In addition to rational thought and logical analysis, notions of affect, intuition, and imagination are also aspects of inquiry (Garrison, 1996). Aspects of creativity and aesthetic appreciation cannot be separated from rationality (Dewey, 1934/1980). A pragmatic view of reality, then, arises from an individual “transaction” with one’s unique situations. Because humans have the capacity to envision multiple ways of knowing, a perspective of experience liberates us from a technical rational perspective, the intention of which cannot be harmony, but only control (Johnson, 1993, p. 124). Professional practice within this perspective is not one of control, distance, and objectivity. Rather we try to control our circumstances as best we can. We “step inside the situation” to study it, and that validity is relative to one’s commitment to particular cultural practices and accepted theories (Schön, 1987).

Thus, graduate school provides a critical time for a student to become more experienced in the values, norms, and practices of the chosen profession while also developing the skills, tools, and habits of inquiry within a discipline. With a pragmatic perspective “tools of doing” and “tools of being” are equally important. The tools of doing involve domains of knowledge, rational thought, and methods of analysis. Tools of being, meanwhile, include human sensibilities, such as care and concern for people and the world, creativity, aesthetic appreciation, and imagination (Garrison, 1996). Together these tools help humans

to develop capacities of creativity, self-reflection, collaboration, communication, commitment, and moral perception (Simpson & Garrison, 1995). In particular, moral issues are inherent in all human activity; thus, inquiry of all forms is “morally appraised, controlled, and guided” by people (Murphey in Dewey, 1922/1988, p. xv.).

A Program of Human Inquiry

The Program of Human Inquiry is proposed as a structure for joint student-faculty portfolios. For students this portfolio records process and product forms of learning—not only the artifacts of graduate school, such as presentations and exams, but artifacts “along the way.” For faculty, this structure suggests a means to record one’s advising efforts. Four components to the Program are suggested: (1) an Acknowledgment of Prior Experiences, (2) a Plan of Study, (3) Avenues of Inquiry, and (4) the matching of Values with Experiences.

Component 1: Acknowledgment of Prior Experiences

It is frequently the case that students and faculty have no idea what experiences each brings to the seminar table. It is as if one’s slate were blank. Over time faculty do learn about students as instructors and advisers. Peers may know little about who sits next to them unless introductions are made formally in class or during group activities. We also know very little about ourselves. Many of us do not realize fully the significance of our own history and the cultural scripts that direct us. I have done some genealogy work and documented the nine generations of ancestors that preceded me in North America. I realized how quickly we were losing not only the artifacts of our lives, but the stories that chronicle lives “between the lines” of birth, marriage, children, and death. The stories that constitute our identity are tended to with less care than the objects we store in closets. The wealth of experiences that graduate students and faculty bring to programs often goes unacknowledged and underused. We may remain generally unaware of how we complement each other, particularly our differences, which would provide opportunities to learn from each other. The Program of Human Inquiry, thus, provides a “dwelling” for one’s own story (Berman, Hultgren, Lee, Rivken, Roderick & Aoki, 1991).

This first component would be the easiest to implement. Summarizing one’s prior experiences might reveal more than what one knows and what one can do, pointing one to initial Avenues of Inquiry, another

component in the Program of Human Inquiry. Formal and informal conversations between student and committee members could begin to lay out one's foundational beliefs and understandings and one's expectations for the program and aspirations. Programs themselves can support this acknowledgment of newcomers through periodic activities, such as weekly social gatherings of students and faculty, a faculty/student profiles directory, periodic public review of student portfolios, electronic discussions, and other collegial practices. Documenting student and faculty experiences, expertise, and research interests could be through a database stored on a web site. Another idea would be with a yearly publication, which would be a more visible means of sharing students and faculty experience. The value of this first component is to honor participants' experiences and to lay the foundations for people to learn from each other.

Component 2: Plan of Study

The Plan of Study links the Program of Human Inquiry to institutional and program requirements and documents the courses, field studies, exams, residency, and publishing and/or portfolio requirements. The Plan of Study provides a check-off list and an agreement between student and committee members as to formal program requirements. Within the Plan of Study component, a student could also record efforts to secure financial aid and scholarships and grants. I have found it helpful to re-cast the Plan of Study by semester, which helped me and my committee to visualize what I had "on my plate" for each semester. When other activities are inserted into this list, including time for exam preparation, research activities, conference attendance and presentations, part-time work and personal obligations, one can make decisions on priorities and boundaries of work. Such decision-making is crucial for managing one's work both in graduate school and as a faculty member. Graduate school is the time to begin learning these habits.

Component 3: Avenues of Inquiry

The third component, Avenues of Inquiry, is perhaps the most fluid, dependent on the discipline and the personalities, interests, and intentions of the faculty committee, the committee chair, and the student. I have chosen "avenues" as the metaphor to denote the choice of

“roads taken” (Progoff, 1975) and to acknowledge the multiple paths one could pursue. Some of these avenues may intersect, such as coursework, teaching, and research. Avenues also require students to make a decision that scholarly inquiry is intentional and requires a long-term commitment. As John-Steiner (1997) has written, “the skill and effort needed to give form to one’s experience and insight requires commitment, a ‘passion for one’s task,’ and the life-long compulsion to probe the troubling, joyous flow of life” (pp. 67–68). I propose several Avenues here.

- Avenue 1: Starting Points
- Avenue 2: Colleague Interactions
- Avenue 3: Knowledge Base & Coursework
- Avenue 4: Teaching
- Avenue 5: Research
- Avenue 6: Professional Organizations & Service

Avenue 1: Starting Points. The first suggested avenue, *starting points*, draws upon prior experience to create a personal mission statement of learning beliefs and initial intentions. This avenue likely would include experiences from the first component. Moving forward, I believe, requires knowing one’s starting point. This avenue provides a place for students to reflect on where they have been and are now, including topics of interest, reading lists, and the beginning of a historical outline or visual map. This mapping could be revealing to both student and advisor—how a student represents the connections between decisions made and outcomes, some of which emerged from engaging in experiences. In effect, the map would record “roads taken and not taken” and the possibilities that emerged from previously unseen options.

Avenue 2: Collegial Interactions. A second avenue involves *collegial interactions* of faculty and peers. Collaboration between people needs to be viewed “not in terms of doing the same research work but, rather, in terms of understanding the work of one another” (Clark et al., 1996, p. 196). I also agree with John-Steiner, Weber, and Minnis (1998) that dialogue within collaborative relationships must be “linked to the participants’ values, shared objectives, and common work” (pp. 775–776). Advisors could periodically assemble their advisees to share common concerns and hear about the work of others. These students could form study or book discussion groups, involving other students and faculty. Such groups, over the tenure of one’s participation in a program, would have much to share with others and in

annual meetings and conferences. This avenue could also document self-reflections by the student and professor on the advisor-advisee relationship and writing about the ways that each has learned from each other. Many of the deliberations that concern graduate students involve self-identity and self-worth, as well as the ethical moral dilemmas of collegial interaction, such as critiquing and respecting each other's work. Within this pragmatic perspective, humans must learn to trust each other, but this requires attention to relationships and honesty.

Much of the doctoral process, however, is a private affair. In some respects, the intellectual struggle must be solitary (Damrosch, 1995), but in others, particularly in matters of discourse practices, human interactions are inherent in inquiry. Another human concern of students is a fear moving into new fields of action. One way that children come to realize that they are not alone in their small, private concerns (Thompson, 1988) is by having teachers or children tell a story as the person sketches a simple picture. Likewise, in the graduate experience adults face very real and personal challenges: grappling with sophisticated ideas, synthesizing and analyzing readings, and engaging in research and sharing findings. Paralysis from fear and a sense of being overwhelmed is a very common concern in graduate school. Through shared social activity, students come to know their uniqueness and their value within the inquiry. They can realize paralysis is not necessarily a bad thing. It may be useful to delay certain actions, step away for a time, or to say "no" to the work of the day. Understanding is enhanced, as Dewey would say, from such activity and new experiences are made possible. One's inquiry inevitably leads to further avenues of inquiry.

Avenue 3: Knowledge Base & Coursework. A third avenue of inquiry comprises a student's knowledge base and coursework. A knowledge base includes reading and study in and out of one's discipline, in addition to what is assigned in coursework. Some outside study provides a student with a means to understand the "edges" of disciplines and how each discipline regards the research enterprise. It is common for faculty to recommend to students books and articles to read. This avenue would record such recommendations as well as student comments on the reading. I have found it useful to create three-ring notebooks that act as portfolios for each course, containing notes and required writings (including drafts), as well as e-mail conversations and reference lists. The student could periodically discuss with the advisor the experiences of each course, what was learned,

its influences on student thinking, and also how one might teach the class if the opportunity existed.

Avenue 4: Teaching. Teaching will likely comprise much of the newly-hired professor's responsibilities. This avenue is sometimes taken by graduate students as teaching assistants; but their involvement in course planning, teaching, and assessment may be varied and minimal. Teaching while in graduate school may be tied to an assistantship and may include lab supervision and grading of papers. Yet this avenue could include opportunities for the student to participate in the collaborative design and enactment of courses gaining experience with assessment of student learning. Furthermore, teaching activities may promote opportunities for research, as in liberal arts institutions where discipline-specific research in ways of teaching subject matter has become a principal research focus (Cech, 1999). It was not my intent to write my dissertation on a teaching model, but this focus emerged out of six years of study on how to teach a particular class. The dissertation allowed me to document how this model emerged and developed over time and what it meant for instructor and students to learn from each other.

Avenue 5: Research. A student's research program may make take different directions as a result of funding opportunities, personal interests, or involvement with faculty and peers. Conferences offer avenues for students to participate in study groups; special interest groups; joint symposia; and the usual roundtable, poster, and paper presentations.

The development of research skills involves learning how different research designs support inquiry through analysis of source material, collaboration with others, and learning how to use ideas to support one's work. Although there are technical aspects to using these tools, I have been intrigued by their human aspects. Habits of discipline and confidence in study and writing, giving and receiving criticism and feedback, making decisions on work priorities, coping with periods of self-doubt about one's work, and struggling to achieve a balance in one's life—all of these have human dimensions that influence inquiry in unexpected and sometimes surprising ways. Conference presentations, for example, provide an opportunity to write for a sophisticated audience, to take risks by communicating what one has to say and offering one's ideas up for feedback and scrutiny. During my graduate experience, my need for practice in writing and presentation gave way to a more pressing need to obtain a critique of my work. Thus, my emphasis shifted from performance to interaction

and collaboration. Volunteering to review conference submissions helps one to synthesize and make critical judgments about others' work. Refereed journal articles provide yet a wider reading of one's work and the possibility of working with others.

The view of research by graduate students typically focuses on the dissertation. A graduate student who says "I'm writing now" usually means that one is writing up results. Because language is a principal tool for professional practitioners, writing and speaking experiences must be ongoing in a graduate program, as they will be in a faculty position. A dissertation focus is necessary at some point in the student's program for completion (See Goodchild, Green, Katz & Kluever, 1997). To assist this, focus doctoral examinations for some students could serve their dissertation in some fashion by providing scholarly practice in the identification of research problems through examination of the literature and proposal of research problems. For others a wider focus on the earlier examinations may be more useful.

The preliminary examination is actually at odds with the nature and spirit of the Program of Human Inquiry. The nature of the exam is judgmental and serves a gate-keeping function; but it also represents a formative opportunity to obtain a committee's constructive reading of one's work, which is more in tune with collaborative practices. I also encourage students to think about dissertations from a faculty member's point of view as they will eventually find themselves in this role. Rarely does a student think about the commitment necessary for a faculty member to read diligently and comment constructively on the student's work. I believe the challenge here is one of commitment and honesty. I have found that faculty pay attention to students who are serious about their work and their involvement in a program, but students have the responsibility for communicating this commitment.

Avenue 6: Organizations & Service. A sixth avenue involves participation at conferences through both presentations and service to the organizations. Initially, the focus by the student can be on presentation and critique, growing accustomed to the habits and discipline of the research cycle, which I call the 4-P's: Proposal, Paper, Presentation, and Publication. Each of these components of the research cycle requires decisions as to audience (Who are you talking to?), content (What do you have to say?), and treatment (How will you communicate your message?). After a time, these presentations may take on a different motivation for a developing scholar, such as "obtaining

a reading of one's work" and desiring more personal involvement with people from other institutions. The involvement in presentation as well as professional service to organizations provides a basis for developing long-term collaborative relationships with colleagues. This activity does require a financial investment and a level of commitment on top of coursework.

Component 4: Values & Experiences

Within this Program of Human Inquiry, traditional program outcomes are re-framed as "values," those particular competencies, dispositions, and sensibilities that come to be viewed by the student and faculty as essential in one's discipline. What we determine to be competencies are in fact value-statements. Having been a member of a graduate curriculum task force and a graduate curriculum committee, in which the need to "articulate values" was or had been raised, some committee members wanted nothing to do with them. For some students and faculty, value-talk gets in the way of proceeding diligently through programs. "I just want to finish and get a job," a purpose perhaps reasonable enough for a master's degree and for those who seek higher pay from additional certification. However, a doctoral degree carries with it future roles and responsibilities that morally necessitate the consideration of values and experiences. Discussions of the graduate experience frequently debate what should be "core" experiences, such as research courses and competencies such as "will demonstrate integration of technology into teaching." Such discussions *are* value choices. The initial value decision, I suggest, involves whether or not values can be openly discussed, committed to paper, lived, and re-examined.

This component will be the most vexing because people have a difficult time committing themselves to identifying values and matching them up with experiences and holding themselves accountable to these joint values-experiences. Such an effort, however, may be the most fruitful over time, if a curriculum of being is to matter, so I will elaborate on its potential. This component also provides a cross-reference with aspects of other components and serves as a "check" against what programs and participants value.

Values undergird possibilities for experiences, while outcomes specify results. Outcomes are means to hold people accountable for curriculum and programs and generally specify what the student should know or be

able to do. Values are better able to address competencies, dispositions, and sensibilities than outcomes because value statements within the Program of Human Inquiry support *emergent* choices of these values *from* experiences. In addition, these values are continually appraised by student and faculty member using this document.

One way to begin to connect experiences to values is to reflect upon one's discipline and ask What does it mean to be human in this field of endeavor? What skills and competencies and means of being does it comprise? This could mean foundational knowledge as well as the skills to use tools. In addition to conceptual understanding, it is necessary to discover the differences within scholarship as well as at the edge of scholarship, and to ask ourselves "what do we not know" (Wagner, 1993).

The nature of experiences include planned experiences that are structured in advance to support the learning of knowledge, competencies, sensibilities, and dispositions. These may be programmatic requirements and revealed through products, such as dissertation, portfolio, published articles, conference or formal examination presentations, as well as process means such as self-reflections, teaching activity, study groups, and working across distance. Within any of these structured experiences can be a particular experience that Dewey described as a holistic, rounded *experience* that "carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency" (Dewey, 1934, p. 35).

It is the nature of experience that not all are planned. Unplanned experiences can have dramatic consequences. As a doctoral student I assisted in the teaching of a graduate course and was designated as a co-instructor on the syllabus. Having co-authored the text, delivered some of the instruction, and provided written feedback on tasks, I carried a status that may have been a good deal higher than most graduate teaching assistants. A month into the course we conducted individual conferences with students, each lasting an hour. Out of the 80 students I had worked with up to this time, only one student refused to participate or respond to any questions. This incident had dramatic affects on me as well as the professor of record. It was an emotionally draining, and for a time, paralyzing experience. However, I realized that it was necessary to re-direct my energies to support the 21 other students in the course. I realized how teaching is a personal act and how sensitively we can regard any reactions or criticism. Mary Catherine Bateson, who has lived much of her in non-Western cultures, has said, "Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding" (1994, p. 17).

Discussion

Overall, avenues of inquiry address the developmental aspect of doctoral studies. Artifacts and other works of expression “utilize the knowledge of the past to project a plan of conduct into the future, and to define what the consequences of that plan of conduct may be expected *to be* [italics mine] . . .” (Dewey, 1922/1988, pp. xx–xxi). A portfolio may record inquiry along another metaphor—life as journey, which, according to Johnson (1993), has several distinguishing features that resonate with doctoral preparation. People purposely move along a path, such as a quest. Supporting conditions are necessary, such as institutional support, program requirements, peers, faculty, and tools (e.g., scholarly material, language, technology). Obstacles will be encountered along the path, including dead-ends, time limitations, faculty access, and personal needs. And there will likely be one or more critical moments where the journey turns. It is within the graduate years that development as a scholar takes place. A portfolio with such journey narrative would provide a more authentic account of an emerging scholar’s voice (e.g., Gruber, 1974; Joas, 1985) than completed papers or projects.

I recommend to students that they map the avenues taken. Such a map is a powerful representation to share with peers. It depicts individuality and rigor within a program, rather than an institutional script to mimic. The avenues of inquiry taken may be quite different among individuals, but they can also be rigorous avenues. Institutional programs cannot rely on rules to cover all contingencies. Human inquiry requires that people trust each other, and so students and faculty must be trusted to support the development of rigorous but negotiated avenues of inquiry.

For new faculty members, teaching and advising can become challenging from a time demand, but also from the personal demand they make. Teaching is a personal activity, and we take it personally when our teaching efforts are scrutinized. The advising aspect of faculty responsibilities carries with it significant demands.

The value of a Program of Human Inquiry to faculty is its pragmatic perspective, “becoming more experienced,” rather than a focus on only competencies. “Being injects a mentor with persuasiveness. Doing and having are secondary influences” (Sinetar, 1998, p. 13). For those advising relationships which deepen into mentoring relationships, a Program of Human Inquiry can help the advisor to support advisees in multiple ways, represented by the four components. There is, however, a personal motivation that must be in place for true mentoring relationships. Public school educator and human resource consultant Marsha Sinetar has

written about the qualities of a mentor. They must, she says, live their values; and in this way students come to trust their mentors. Over time, mentors are seen as imperfect humans. "If we have the luxury of working alongside our mentors, we see their flaws" (p. 22). A critical aspect of the relationship is authentic dialogue, one characterized by intimate listening, nonjudgmental, and satisfying a need for the student to be heard. Productive mentors, according to Sinetar, are "spontaneously gifted life artists"; and because of their love of life they encourage life in others and model empathy, spirit of learning, and habits of working. Ultimately, mentors know when it's time for the student to move on.

The Program of Human Inquiry aggressively raises the stakes on advisor and advisee involvement in terms of time and genuine engagement. The student must be willing to engage in experiences, establish collegial relationships, make decisions about avenues to follow, be diligent, and have a "passion for one's task" (John-Steiner, 1997). The graduate years are the ideal time to develop these habits of inquiry. However, establishing the Program is likely to be met with stiff resistance from those concerned about the status quo. The intent of this proposal is to attract those who desire to gain as much meaning as possible from their graduate experience and faculty looking to learn alongside their students.

The proposed Program of Human Inquiry provides doctoral students and faculty with a structured means to support a joint scholarly inquiry into a discipline. It provides a portfolio for communication between student and faculty, as a reflective tool for the student and an advising record for the advisor. The Program also models for students and faculty the skills, tools, dispositions, habits, and sensibilities of one's profession, addressing not only the subject-matter domain but the broader issues of inquiry within the discipline and the implications of these issues. The Program's pragmatic basis welcomes all perspectives but serves as a means to scrutinize one's perspective so that its significance is continually re-examined and transformed by ongoing examination (Mead, 1930), an "analysis of taken-for-granted meanings that are assumed to be true" (Marsick, 1998, p. 125).

The *esse* of doctoral preparation, scholarly inquiry, merits inclusion in these programs. Such inclusion will contribute to quality students, as long as funding exists to support commitment to time and opportunities to experience human inquiry. Quality students ensure quality programs. Washington University (Magner, March 21, 1997) recently reported that with fewer students, the same amount of money fully supported them, thus attracting better students and increasing retention, while degrees took less time to complete. Some faculty worry about

fewer graduate students as teaching assistants and fewer students to fill classes and seminars. However, programs at Washington University have reported that these quality students finished in a reasonable time and found jobs. With fewer applicants and fewer slots in doctoral programs, administrators and faculty at both public and private universities are beginning to experiment with a “smaller is better” approach (Magner, February 26, 1999).

Humans have a remarkable capacity to see and construct significance from their experiences. We seem able and willing to look past our limitations to envision possibilities to live imaginatively—to acknowledge and tap the full range of what it means to be human. Rather than looking up and beyond, however, our gaze is sometimes fixed downward. This is not to diminish a very practical and disciplinary need to focus and specialize; but a sustained posture that “drills into the detail,” without an occasional stepping out to reflect, re-examine, and share our perspectives, deprives us of opportunities for growth. To envision possibilities, as the Program of Human Inquiry intends, presents faculty and prospective faculty with an imaginative base for communication and improved understanding.

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