

Chapter 1

Research Contexts

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the various aspects of the research contexts of doctoral research projects, namely the study environments of doctoral students, domains of discourse, technology support structures available at universities, program and department leadership support, professional and research networks, types of inter-disciplinary research, and trends in the contexts that are evident in the contemporary business environment.

1.1 STUDY ENVIRONMENTS OF DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Doctoral students have traditionally registered at doctoral granting universities for full-time study, and were required to meet specific residency requirements. This remains the situation at some universities, and the most prominent of these have high entrance requirements, and high expectations throughout the research process. This tradition has changed and at this time graduate students who enroll for doctoral studies, fall into other groups, including students studying in part-time, online and open distance learning modes. Despite changes in mode of study, some form of pre-condition for entry into a doctoral program exists at all doctoral granting institutions.

- **Student-Scholars:** In this text students who study in full-time mode without employment external to the university are called student-scholars. Such students typically have scholarships, grants or some kind of funding, enabling them to remain on campus full-time for the

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duration of study. Some of these students receive paid temporary part time appointments within a college or university, as research assistants, teaching assistants, or administrative assistants to complement their income. A specific number of hours per week is permitted for temporary part-time positions.

- **Practitioner-Scholars:** With tuition fees in North America rising substantially over recent years, and grant funding becoming limited and not sufficient to cover expenses, students have opted to seek employment to complement the income received from grants and assistantships. Another group of more mature students have resulted, named practitioner-scholars here, since they are employed in their field of research interest, and their mode of study is part-time. The skills and experience they have, and continue to obtain, add value to their knowledge base. In recent years of economic down turn there are many instances where doctoral students get “laid-off” and cannot find employment in their field of study. This poses more of a challenge for their studies since the experience they are getting are considered out-of-field, and do not add value towards their studies.

These realities often hamper progress and the student cannot keep to the proposed schedule. As a result completion of the research project is delayed and the research sometimes extends longer than the allowable period for completion of the dissertation research stage, causing termination of the student’s doctoral candidature. In other cases the student withdraws from the program voluntarily without ever returning to complete the doctorate. Over time other modes of study have become available, such as distance study programs, and with the advent of the Internet, fully online doctoral programs. Some of these programs have attendance requirements during the program in the form of on-ground sessions of limited duration, throughout the doctoral studies. Research supervision in online programs presents different challenges that are have been ameliorated in recent times by many communication and sharing tools, as reviewed in Section 1.4.

1.2 DOMAINS OF DISCOURSE

Research domains and fields of interest vary considerably, as do the domains of discourse, and may be situated in industry, commerce, civilian life, the military, non-profit enterprises, and more. Likewise, industry sectors are

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