

Literature and insights Editorial

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Are you being served?

Many AAAJ readers are involved in tertiary education, whether as course designers, lecturers, tutors or students. It is timely to remind ourselves why business schools exist, and not only because of recent disclosures of unacceptable practices in the banking sector in my own country. A closer look at the superannuation industry is next, it seems.

This aspect of course design should matter not only to educational practitioners and their students but to the graduates who move on to the industry. Fortunately, I can lean on an article that promotes a very similar opinion to my own on this matter.

We know that achieving the key purpose of any tertiary course can become more challengingly difficult when it becomes tangled up in various administration issues, e.g., who is available to teach and are they good at it; how often is material updated or augmented; what modes of delivery are used and how; and, what are the subject choices in the major stream and degree (i.e. the bundling effect)? While these are genuine concerns, it is more important to consider a long-run aspect; how the purpose of a given course aligns with the social need.

As Falkenstein (2018) says:

The financial crisis of 2008 as well as ongoing global social and environmental challenges brought a new impetus to the business education debate. Fingers were not just pointed at irresponsible managers. Questions were also asked about whether or not business and management schools could have provided the theoretical and mental models behind the business and investment thinking that caused the crisis.

Is that idea of purpose revisited often enough? When it is reviewed and course content adjusted, how formal and rigorous is the process? Which stakeholders get to have input? Who is then accountable for the revised course and its outcomes, and how? Falkenstein (2018) adds that:

Business schools are under increasing pressure to respond to societal needs. This means they have to exhibit a true commitment to ethics, responsibility and sustainability at an organisational level or face the loss of legitimacy that they derive from society at large.

I will let you find Falkenstein's article for an expansion of the central issues that he covers in the comments above, except to say that one identified problem is the apparent gap between what some schools say and what they do. Accountability for walking the talk is a primary concern.

Properly monitored and updated, business courses can equip graduates with skills and an ethical framework that allow them to meet expectations of the wider community they serve rather than only their immediate employers or project goals.



Given the above, it is very timely to consider the mentoring relationship between postgraduates and their supervisors. Completing a PhD is a daunting task, and not always just for the student. While the supervisors do get to practice their side of the arrangement more often and ought to be effective guides, all can benefit from some prompts.

Niamh M. Brennan's extensive contribution in this issue addresses the working details of just that relationship with a framework to assist students to find their way through the study process. It includes introductory notes and features a suite of suggestions in a tabular format for easy reference. It is the kind of tool that I imagine supervisors could hand to their students with a guided plan for productive discussion.

I would like to foreshadow my next column as well here, because it showcases another of Niamh's projects in the form of 100 suggestions for research practice and maximising the chances of publication; an excellent complement to this issue – thank you, Niamh!

Next time, we will also have some creative writing for your delectation. Your own contributions can be submitted via ScholarOne (see below), and your e-mail correspondence is always welcome at: steve.evans@flinders.edu.au.

Steve Evans
Literary Editor

Reference

Falkenstein, M. (2018), "Business schools need to reconnect with society", University World, News Global Edition Issue 511, 22 June, available at: www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2018061914274232