The Dissertation Process in Obtaining Philosopher Doctorate in Business Administration

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Abstract

This paper discuses the dissertation process of obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) of Accounting. The paper list the general steps that are required in any rigorous PHD process. Many students that are contemplating obtaining a Ph.D. degree are unaware of the rigorous processes that are involved. The decision to obtain a doctoral degree is made for varied reasons such as aspirations, work advancement and increased wages. The decision to undertake a doctoral degree is tedious task that requires one to evaluate several activities such as tuition cost, support from relatives, the time required to complete the degree process and the choice in foregoing certain routine activities. The process requires a lot of strength and discipline to be successful. Statistics show that only 50% of doctoral candidate actually complete their dissertation process.

Keywords: Institutional Review Board, Plagiarism, Informed Consent, Privacy, Mentorship

Introduction

The decision to undertake a doctoral degree is made for different reasons such as an aspiration, work advancement, and increased wages ((Wasburn-Moses, 2008). The decision to pursue a doctorate degree is important milestone that can affect the student for the greater part of their life. The process involved in obtaining a doctorate degree is a tedious task that requires one to underscore the main benefits and requirement needed such tuition fees and books, the support to be derived from relatives and friends, and the time needed for completing assignment and dissertations. Also the students need to understand that the process requires a lot of strength and discipline to be successful. The process involved in developing a research question, understanding the methodology to employ within the research, the creation of literature review, creating a concept paper and dissertation proposal, obtaining permission for the actual research itself is a daunting task requiring care, integrity and discipline. This paper will provide a platform for assessing the process of maintaining integrity and highest level of ethical standards in the research process by exploring core values required for a research process within business environment.

Literature Review

Undertaking a doctorate degree in business from the perspective of a literature review requires an individual with a determination and will to succeed and not the research in particular (Jazvac-Martek, 2009). It requires an individual with the determination and innate strength that will rise above any roadblocks usually encountered during the journey process of the degree. An individual in the pursuit of a doctorate degree will require an extensive evaluation, collection, examination, and organization of a volume of data usually from different sources such as scholastic articles and other peer reviewed sources. A lot of students within the business field find this process to be demanding task that requires following strict formats, directions, and evaluating information that do not produce the conclusion required. Very disturbing is the fact that students and other researchers are opting for shoddy work and approaches in arriving at conclusions. The basis of scientific research is strengthened on the assumption that scholars will adopt ethical standards (Artino & Brown, 2009).

Plagiarism

Research misconducts have the potential to create damage to the integrity of scientific research (Horrom, 2012). The scientific community are seriously looking at the threat of plagiarism on research and looking intently at the greater detail that this is affecting the academic field. The term "plagiarism" makes a lot of researchers think about the need to produce an original research. The variety of research assumptions makes it difficult to define the meaning of plagiarism (Singh & Bennington, 2012). The search for the meaning of plagiarism from yahoo search engines uncovered millions of results. Graduate students are requiring clarity and preciseness to the meaning to plagiarism and how to prevent it occurrence. Many professors and other educators have compounded the problem of the real meaning of plagiarism and have thus heightened the problem (Singh & Bennington, 2012). Plagiarism is the biggest shuffle that students face during their dissertation phase. Students who commit the acts of plagiarism contend that they were often not careful and were under strenuous conditions (Nancy & Chester-Fangman, 2011). The problem in plagiarism is cancer whose antidote has proven to be ineffective because many professors have not very well underscored the importance of maintaining integrity and following accepted conducts within professional research work.

The problem of plagiarism continues to be critical issue and many students caught in the process may be unintentional and the education on the subject and its resultant consequences to students is priceless in avoiding the acts of plagiarism (Davis, 2011). The growth of the internet have also exacerbated the problem and led to increase avenues for publications. The increase outlets for research publications coupled with increase in scholarships for research publications for both students and professors have also compounded the problem. The problem of plagiarism is solvable if students can cite their work properly or direct readers to sources they use in their original research work. A lot of students are penalized for plagiarism as a result of their failure to adhere to organization of research work, management of their time and evaluations of their own work. Students who plagiarize are likely to take such unethical behavior to work places and the field they found themselves in after school (Titus & Bosch, 2010).

In solving the problem of plagiarism, professors, scholars, students and publishing outlets must all play a part in educating one another about the need to employ care and professionalism when writing and conducting research. Higher learning institutions and universities have a role to play in preventing plagiarism in educating their students about the need to be ethical and offer clearer guidelines and interpretation about plagiarism. A good direction from universities will also require that their students undergo some level training and complete an examination of plagiarism to pinpoint some of the infractions. Academic leaders from head of institutions in higher learning institutions have a responsibility in setting out cultural and institutional policies for responsible and truthful research conduct. (Titus & Bosch, 2010).

In working in any academic work or scientific work, if students doubt the source of their references, it is incumbent on students cite that work with the intent of avoiding unintentional plagiarism. In many instances, students pursuing a doctorate degree might not have level of imagination, comprehension, and ideas to incorporate changes within their research projects. The choice in pursing ethical conduct in any research project is the choice of the student. As such, students must endeavor to stay abreast with research changes and new policies regarding research processes. All scientific journals must also be accountable for any materials that are published on their websites (Horrom, 2012).

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is pre-requisite for any empirical research that requires students to evaluate any activities that are likely to affect the students, the school and research participants. Self assessment allows the students to identify any type of risk that may affect their research and ensure that efforts are made in designing controls to militate against those risks. In assessing risk to any research work, a research can locate common risk that can affect the research being understudied. The risk that is most common in research studies involves the reputation of the researcher, legal disputes, and financial obligations. Koocher and Keith-Spiegel (2010) noted that the most common risk in any scientific research is plagiarism, falsification of records and research sources, and fabricating research content. The penalties for these risks are mostly severe and the damages caused can span for several period of time. What students also need to understand is that, risk are dynamic and they change over a period of time and constant assessment of any risk portfolio in scientific research is integral and paramount in any study.

Truex, Cuellar, Takeda, and Vidgen,(2011), stated that the changes in risk assessment requires that there is constant assessment of information, gathering, and recording appropriate data and sharing information with those important to the research like the mentors, peers and participant within the research.

Informed Consent

The principle behind an informed consent is the quest to be truthful and the act of showing respect between researchers and research participants. Scientific research employs a number of terms in describing ethical protections used in scientific research in efforts to protect the rights of research participants (Trochim, 2006). The process within scientific research requires that no individual is required to participate within a specific research and research participant must voluntarily opt to be part of any research study when approached. Those who agree to participate in the research study must also be protected from possibility of retaliations or apprehensions. Research participants must be made aware of research processes and any subsequent risk that they might be exposed to. Research participants must consent to their participation in any research work. The researcher must endeavor to protect all research participants against any psychological or physical harm. A parental consent is necessary when the research participants is below the age of 18 and within a case where the researcher cannot obtain a consent for some reason, appropriate documentation would be required for this departure.

Privacy and Confidentiality

A lot of students misconstrued privacy and confidentiality as same but whist they are used simultaneously, there are differences between the two terms (Mbanaso, Cooper, Chadwick, & Anderson, 2009). Privacy may be defined as a person 'a person having control over the extent, timing and circumstance of sharing oneself with others' (Columbia University, n.d). It refers the individual right of person to prevent others from accessing information or other activities from themselves. For example individual consider their home as their private residence and people need permission before entering their home. In further illustration a religious leader may not want to be associated with going to bars where people drink or clubs as this have the tendency of creating stigmatization (Webb, 2008; Dinwiddie, 2012).

Confidentiality on the hand involves the protection of person's privacy. It relates to how information related by an individual to third party in position of trust (e.g. Pastors, Community Leaders, and Doctors etc) is treated. The expectation is that such individuals will not share information without first hand seeking the express permission of that individual. The individual right to privacy is not negotiable. Information retrieved and collected from individuals must remain confidential at all times and should be exposed or reviewed by others by others only if they have permission to do so. For example an employer may not seek the medical information of their employees without their prior consent. Individuals who have been incarcerated in the past cannot have their records release without a court order or their permission. Student who enroll within a schools have right for their information to protected at all times

Within the scientific community, confidentiality is used to assure research participants and its one of the ethical standards applied in the field of academics. Researchers normally provide a confidentiality agreement to research participants and build relationship with them during this process. For a number of years the main aim of the National Academies of Sciences has been aimed on how to provide confidentiality to research participants and research access (Levine, 2008). The disregard for confidentiality and privacy has caused many research participants to lose their jobs, caused psychological and physical harm, embarrassment, and financial liabilities (Webb, 2008; Dinwiddie, 2012). There are number statutory regulations that protect and provide confidentiality and privacy to the educational records of student and an example of this is the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This act places limitation on anyone from assessing the educational records of students without the written prior permission of that student (Levine, 2008). Another statutory act is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) that protect patients from wrongful access of their health records without proper authorization. An example of violation happened recently when the wife of Prince Harry of UK wife's pregnancy information was leaked by imposter radio station from Australia. This subsequently caused the life of the nurse that leaked the information whose apparent death was linked to the leaked information for the fear of her being prosecuted.

It is expedient that all researchers take due care in protecting research participants and the information that they provide during the research phase.

Whilst errors and lack of judgment can affect this course, researchers must endeavor to review all stages of information to ensure they are protected. Researchers must follow all established rules and regulation concerning the research process to limit and prevent any accidental or unintentional abuse of confidentiality and privacy during the research phase

Data Handling and Reporting

The process of research requires that data is collected, reported and handled properly in guaranteeing the legitimacy of the research process. When research involves the use of human subjects, the Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) has been given mandate by the federal government to provide guidance and ensure that there are no abuses of human subjects. More so when researchers obtain information from individual sources that centers on behavioral patterns, the researcher must ensure sensitivity and look into the well being of those involved and assess at each stage the level of comfort needed and required (Evans & Combs, 2008). The handling of data can impact the value of research and hence it is important that at each stage of a research process, all data used in the process are handled appropriately. Every institution has a set of standards that direct the student in their data collection, handling and reporting process and student must endeavor to follow those policies and guidelines. The validity or otherwise of data collected by a research student is not only a reflection of that student but also the institution that the students is attending.

There are number of ways that data can be collected and they include; (a) tape recording, (b) personal note taking, (c) observations, and (d) setting out questionnaires. The process of data collection requires one to be consistent, follow specific guidelines and processed with its objective of replication by one outside of the research study. After data collection process is the storage of the said data. Data storage is very priceless as the validity of the research is dependent on those data. The end of one research can mark the beginning of another research hypothesis or question, the identification of new research questions and the retrieval of information in an event the outcome relied on is needed (Turk, 2010; Evans & Combs, 2008). It is also important that researchers have contingency plan in effect of one storage process failure and such data must also be secured to ensure only responsible and authorized access.

Mistakes and Negligence

The nature of scientific research and the process that are required makes it not immune to errors and mistakes. The process of writing at the doctoral have the ability to challenge and create complexity for the students as there is little or no experience gained at this stage in the writing of scholarly articles and the process of publishing articles. Understanding how each student learn and adapt to the rigorous process can be the starting point of noting how student are able to understand the learning process and are committed to ensuring a quality writing process. According to Schoenherr & Williams-Jones, (2011), over a number of years, the processes of leaning at the graduate level have being analyzed in evaluating the perceived understanding of students.

There is need to ensure that research have the highest level of integrity whether those researches are undertaken by doctoral students or those with experience in research. The conducts of any individual research must meet the highest level of standards and expectation in the bid to bring sanity and sanctity to research process. Research peer reviewers and mentors who supervise the research process have duty to ensure that mistakes are prevented and negligence on the side of the student or even experienced researchers are avoided (Pitcher, 2011). Negligence on the part of the student can be reduced or prevented when the student and the mentors who work on any research work are committed to ensure that every research follows the rigorous process. Students who fail to meet some of these rigorous standards suffer removal from their schools, reputational damage, and having to repeat the process.

Working with the Mentor

Having a mentor can be likened to a child growing up who needs directions in order to be successful. Mentors play a key role by facilitating the research process and ensuring that all parts of the research meets the student's academic standards and other generally accepted research guidelines. Most universities in the United States have mentoring process where the student is modeled through the research process and taught the through the journey of doctoral experience (Zipp, Cahill, & Clark 2009).

There is no argument that having a mentor in the doctoral process provides students with right levels of support, expertise and encouragement to help them become successful in their doctoral journey and also achieve the experience needed at the doctoral level. The main aim of the mentor is to encourage the student to learn and adopt the best research practices. From the start of developing a research question, concept paper, dissertation proposals to dissertation materials, the mentor is in every step of the way to help the student and provide the requisite feedback and advice to help the student to be successful.

During the research process such as collating data, interviewing research participants, and analyzing research information, the mentor provide an invaluable help and support to the students. Zip et al (2009) noted that the use of mentors within the doctoral study can have stronger impact on students to produce quality work and also enhance the doctoral institutions performance in learning within higher institutions.

Requirements for IRB Approval

The IRB refers to the Institutional Review Board and their aim is in ensuring that every research within an academic or professional discipline aligns itself to established guidelines and procedures. The main process ensures when conducting research, the following are observed; (1) subjects involved in research are not exposed to risk and any risk is minimized relative to the benefits that inure from them, (2) there are fair processes used in the selection of subjects, (3) participants have an informed consent to a research, (4) the safety of participants and data is guaranteed, and (5) protection of privacy (Rutherford-Hemming, Vlasses, &Rogers, 2012). The policy of any University will be to ensure that research conducted by faculty or students are in compliance with these laws and other federal laws within the United States that deals with human subjects and other living creatures.

There are number of approval processes required by students before the student can begin the data collection processes within any University. One of such approval processes is within the context of seeking permission or informed consent from research population. No Student can start data collection processes in the form of interviews without first seeking permission from the research participant. A number of universities use the consent form, whose nature and purpose provide description for the research, any benefits to inure from the research, the research questions, hypothesis, and contact information of the researcher (Appelbaum, Lidz, & Klitzman, 2009).

Discussion

Research has shown that most research dishonesties are committed by students, researchers, and authors. Due the lack of experience, it appears that students are by far those committing academic dishonesty (Comas-Forgas & Sureda-Negre (2010). The pressure to publish articles is also exacerbating the problem. The problem of research dishonesty is widespread problem and plagiarism appears to be major issue within many universities. Ballamingie and Johnson (2011) noted that many students struggle with the many requirements in meeting ethical standards within the academic rigor. The posture of many students failing to adhere to academic integrity could be trace to their own doing as a result of laziness or wanton disregard to ethical standards.

Many students also face the problem of not having the balance of support from mentors to guide them on the track of academic research process. Many students also lack funds to complete the thorough research process. Pursuing a doctoral degree requires one to be emotionally and mentally ready to pass to the process. Sometimes the process can be best described as "a baptism of fire" as the student becomes overwhelmed with the challenges and weight of issues to be dealt with. The encompassing element of including various literatures that support research is also sometimes a dilemma for students. Even more academically brilliant student can not complete their degree without some of sort of assistance from faculty and others outside their doctoral institution.

In order for doctoral students to be successful, they need deeper understanding of the dissertation process and the experience to be successful for their development in research writing after they complete their studies. Students must be given adequate support throughout their learning process to aid them in becoming effective at their varying fields of endeavor. Pursing a doctoral study online can be daunting and a lonely exercise and students must appreciate the support they gain from mentors and take advantage of it. History have proved that taking short cut and being lazy in the research phase can prove to be disastrous and students must take a cue from that when embarking on their research project.

Recommendation

It is well noted saying that charity begins at home. Learning to be ethical is a value that is learnt from parents, schools, religious organizations and communities. The environment is the greatest influence of the values that one acquires during their formative years. The importance of research is core to any academic pursuit and as such many institutions have established rules and regulations that are codified to aid and direct students in their higher learning pursuit. Every student has a responsibility in ensuring that, they follow their institutions code of ethics and standards and avoid ethical misconduct. This will ensure that the student is successful in their doctoral pursuit

Conclusion

Every student in any endeavor must ensure that they are following the right code of ethics and standards enshrined within the core principles of the institutions they attend. Failure to follow these standards can spell doom for the student. In pursing this purpose, doctoral students must ensure that every single research follows the guidelines of the research standards. Most empirical research should have an introduction, purpose statement, research problem, literature review, data collection and analysis, findings, recommendations and conclusions. When a student carefully follows these formats, apply the rigorous standards of the research process, and avoid plagiarism, that student can be guaranteed of passing the doctoral study. More so, when these standards are followed it can pass reviews by outside sources and research community.

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