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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Origin and Evolution of the Behavior Analysis Program at the University of Nevada, Reno

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Abstract The origins of the Behavior Analysis program at the University of Nevada, Reno by way of a self-capitalized model through its transition to a more typical graduate program is described. Details of the original proposal to establish the program and the funding model are described. Some of the unusual features of the program executed in this way are discussed, along with problems engendered by the model. Also included is the diversification of faculty interests over time. The status of the program, now, after 25 years of operation, is presented.

Keywords Behavior analysis · Entrepreneurship · Graduate training · University of Nevada, Reno

In 1990, we made the University of Nevada, Reno an offer it could not refuse: to establish a doctoral program and a professional master's program in Behavior Analysis in the Psychology Department at virtually no cost to the university or to the department. The self-capitalization plan, as we called it (Hayes, Hayes, Ghezzi, Bijou, Williams, & Follette, 1995), amounted to turning the university into a vendor for sorely needed state services that behavior analysts were uniquely capable of providing. By delivering these services on a fee-for-service basis, we would generate revenue for faculty salaries, student stipends, and program operating costs. Our faculty would manage these services and our students would be trained in them.

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A Self-Capitalized Program Model

Before describing our model for program development and some of its outcomes to date, it may be of some benefit to those with similar aims to describe certain aspects of our proposal to establish the program. First, we asked for probationary approval of the program for a 5-year period, with continuation in permanent status to be contingent upon the achievement of pre-specified outcomes. The outcomes we specified to attain permanent status for the program were to (a) recruit and retain qualified students, in numbers sufficient to sustain it; (b) contribute to the vitality of other departmental programs; (c) be built with the resources envisioned; and (d) generate state support and the placement of students in positions appropriate to their training (Hayes et al., 1995). Second, because our aim was to develop a graduate training program, not a service agency per se, we were careful to align our proposed faculty roles and responsibilities with those of regular members of the faculty. In particular, we proposed that the Behavior Analysis faculty would have office spaces in the Psychology Department, comparable teaching loads to those of other faculty, comparable departmental and university service commitments, normal voting rights, and be evaluated for merit raises and promotions using the same standards and procedures as were in place for other departmental faculty. There were to be only two differences: the faculty lines were to be non-tenure-track and faculty salaries were to be generated by their own entrepreneurial efforts.

The proposal also included a plan for program growth over time: we proposed that the university match our self-funded faculty lines with state-supported lines. This provision pertained to the university at large, however, not to the Psychology Department. From the standpoint of the Psychology Department, it was evident we were prepared to give more than we expected to receive and would ask for resources only on the basis of program success. Moreover, the need for increased resources over time appeared to be a rather remote consequence of success rather than a necessary and difficult antecedent to it. As such, the department was in a position to vote on the idea of a successful program rather than on the need to divert existing resources to a new program. Needless to say, the department approved the proposal, and the program's continuation in permanent status was granted at the end of the probationary period.

In retrospect, it would have been a good idea to engage the university per se in a contract of sorts, one by which our entrepreneurial efforts would be rewarded by additional faculty lines. The pitch we made to the university in 1990 went like this: "Administrators are accustomed to hearing the constant moans of department chairs and program administrators. Our message is extremely unusual and provides welcome relief. We will achieve your goals, and when we do we will want a specific amount of resources to help sustain our efforts" (Hayes et al., 1995, p. 332). In short, the additional resources needed to sustain our efforts were rather vaguely specified. Frankly, the agreement with the university to establish and maintain the program was more of a handshake with a sympathetic Dean of the Graduate School than it was a contract with the university—an arrangement that might have been workable had it not been for the succession of presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs who had increasingly little knowledge of or commitment to our program. There was no quid pro quo on faculty lines of the sort we had anticipated from the university. Consequently, it took 24 years to accumulate, in bits and pieces, five full-time, fully supported, tenure-track lines (see Fig. 1). Initially, we recruited faculty whose scholarly interests were in the applied domain to facilitate entrepreneurial activities. More recently, with full salaries coming from the university, we have begun to recruit across other domains (e.g., experimental analysis of behavior). Interestingly, all of these lines came *directly* to the program from central administration.

The growth of our program was not stifled simply because we failed to educate the succession of administrators as to its nature and value, however. It was also because we were not achieving "their goals." Administrators pay special attention to indirect cost recovery and credit-hour production, neither of which we were supplying in significant quantities to warrant their attention. We argued for and were successful at charging the most minimal of indirect costs for our services, and we were not getting federally funded research grants to make up for it. Likewise, with very few faculty positions in the early days and with a course-heavy graduate curriculum to deliver, we were not producing a large number of undergraduate credits. Given the program's model, we *had* to operate in this manner. As a result, the resources—specifically the faculty resources—needed to sustain our efforts were not immediately forthcoming. A lesson learned.

Program Resources

Returning to the self-capitalization model, building a graduate program from scratch required resources, and those resources came for the most part from service delivery, particularly in the area of developmental disabilities. Delivering services for a fee is one thing. Delivering services for the purpose of funding a graduate training program is quite another. To do the latter, it was necessary to have a means of leveraging the fees received. In our model, this leverage came from the salary savings generated when graduate and undergraduate students delivered services in exchange for academic credit. Specifically, we offered undergraduate field experience courses in which students received hands-on training in service delivery. These trainees made up our front-line service staff, generating the bulk of our billable hours. The undergraduate trainees

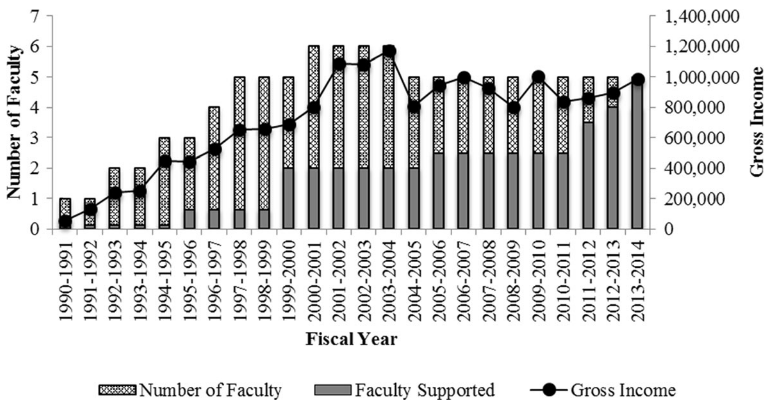

Fig. 1 The number of faculty on staff, the number of faculty supported by program funds, and program gross income per academic year

were supervised by graduate students, who were participating in this capacity in exchange for practicum credits in applied behavior analysis and organizational behavior management. These trainees made up our managerial staff. Faculty members supervised the graduate students in exchange for their salaries and program operating costs. For over 20 years, we engendered revenue from this source: we did not permit students to complete their practical training requirements at external entities at no financial cost to those entities. We worked with entities willing to pay for our students' labor or, alternatively and more typically, our students completed their practical training in the context of faculty-operated services. This aspect of our model has recently been abandoned in the interest of providing a greater variety of practical experiences, the long-term outcome of which remains to be seen.

Over the years, the services delivered by the program have expanded considerably. The original services, which have continued to the present day, pertained to severely challenged adults with developmental disabilities, services for young children with autism, and remedial educational services. To further meet the needs for services to persons with autism and other disabilities, we initiated off campus, "satellite" master's programs in behavior analysis. These programs have been in continuous operation since 1995. Their aim is to provide training to fully employed human-service workers who have no other access to such training. These programs have been delivered to multiple cohorts of students in Illinois, Missouri, Florida, California, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. And along with these services have come complementary applied research interests, as well as basic research in our animal laboratory, and a continued emphasis on behavior theory and philosophy.

Challenges of a Self-Capitalization Model

The self-capitalization model of program development generates a number of unusual and challenging circumstances (Hayes, Houmanfar, Garlock, Ghezzi, Williams, & Carr, 1999). For example, a new faculty line is viewed as an investment rather than a cost. As new faculty members developed business enterprises, the funds produced by those enterprises were significantly greater than the amounts needed to cover their salaries. The remaining funds were put toward graduate stipends, secretarial support, equipment, and so on. The gross income of the program had tended to vary with the number of faculty in place (see Fig. 2), and the aim was always to invest in more faculty members.

Likewise, under more ordinary circumstances, a graduate stipend is considered a cost, one to be considered carefully. In our case though, in as much as our graduate students were managing our entrepreneurial enterprises, it was in the program's best interest to admit as many students as could be accommodated. Active recruitment of undergraduate students was also a high priority.

There are downsides to these unusual features, however. First, a non-tenure-track appointment to a new graduate program, operating by way of an unproven financial strategy, was not particularly attractive to faculty recruits. Of course, this was further complicated by that expectation that, in addition to meeting the usual demands of teaching, research, and service, recruits were expected to develop and manage businesses with sufficient revenues to pay their salaries. Nevertheless, over the life of the program, we were able to make eight very good hires (though only four of the eight

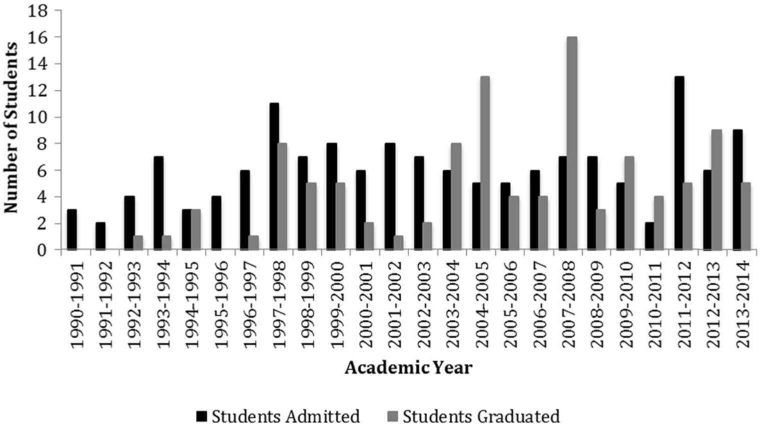

Fig. 2 The number of graduate students (master's and doctoral) admitted and graduated per academic year

were ultimately retained). With our recent achievement of fully funded tenure-track lines for all of our existing faculty, and for all future hires should we have the opportunity, we are finally relived of this limitation.

The need to admit as many graduate students as were needed to operate faculty-operated businesses also had a downside: our graduation rates were lower than was typical of more ordinary graduate programs. Nonetheless, we were able to recruit excellent students. We have conferred 45 doctoral degrees and over 80 master's degrees since the inception of the program (see Fig. 2), and our graduates are well placed in positions worthy of their training.

With fully funded faculty lines now in place, the need to operate businesses for which large numbers of students are required is significantly lessened. Our service operations and other enterprises are not likely to be abandoned though. They remain important training sites for both graduate and undergraduate students, as well as provide reliable sources of financial support for them. In addition, our entrepreneurial activities have provided significant outreach benefits for the university.

As mentioned previously, we were not generating huge quantities of undergraduate credits during the early years of the program due to the curricular demands of our graduate programs. This was more than rectified by our taking responsibility for the massively enrolled Introductory Psychology course by way of a modified Personalized System of Instruction plan. Important, as well, has been our contributions to the behavior-analytic training of students in other graduate programs (e.g., clinical psychology, special education) and to the department as a whole. We have provided opportunities for students in these programs to enroll in our graduate courses (theoretical, philosophical, basic, and applied). Moreover, our faculty members have served on master's and dissertation committees, and collaborated in areas of research with faculty members and students from other graduate programs.

Throughout our history, and most surely because of it, we have pursued an open book financial plan. Financial information pertaining to the operations of the program have been shared with everyone, including graduate students, at monthly program meetings. This practice has been critical to the survival of our program, alerting us to problems—and solutions—in a timely manner, and offering a uniquely important training experience for future practitioners. It has also contributed to the professional training of our graduate students. Whether this level of financial transparency will continue to be useful as the program transitions out of its self-capitalization model remains to be seen.

Current Program Status

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Behavior Analysis Program at the University of Nevada, Reno. For the first time in our history, we were able to hire a new faculty member into a fully funded tenure-track line. Our doctoral and master's degree programs have been fully accredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis International since 1999. Our Satellite Programs are thriving and poised to make a significant contribution to the training of behavior analysts around the world. We have developed a formal Undergraduate Specialization in Behavior Analysis for which we are seeking accreditation. And in 2010, the program received the "Organizational Enduring Contribution to Behavior Analysis" award from the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis. In short, all is well in Reno.

Recommendations for Building a Successful Self-Capitalized Graduate Program

Establishing a graduate program in behavior analysis on a self-capitalized plan, as herein described, is not an easy task. In our experience, its accomplishment was critically dependent on a number of factors. These included a need for the types of services the program could provide to the community, an already established member of the department of psychology to make the case for the program, a receptive administrator to hear the case, and someone qualified and willing to deliver the program's curriculum without compensation until others could be recruited. It took over 20 years to achieve full institutional recognition as measured in state appropriated faculty support. Our continuing success has been demonstrated by recruitment, retention, and placement of highly competitive students along with the capacity to support them throughout their training. In so doing, we have met the regional needs for services originally envisioned. Added to this, the Behavior Analysis Program at the University of Nevada, Reno is fully accredited by the Association for Behavior Analysis International and is recognized internationally for the quality of its training and service to the discipline.

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