15

Educating Educators: A Case Study on Human Centered Management Education

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Introduction

Upon graduation, new doctors of education (EdD), scholar-practitioners typically hold influential positions as university professors, executive managers, and corporate leaders. These fledgling doctors of education springboard into the competitive workforce armed with uniquely designed concepts of leadership and social fairness. No binding commonality of professional oath exists to provide general moral and ethical guidance to influence and nourish societal benefit. Meanwhile, McFarlane and Orgazon (2011) report that economic growth and wealth accumulation remain primary motives to pursue higher academic degrees.

For scholars and lecturers who seek to facilitate student transformation, the task requires time away from academia and a period of genuine reflection to gain new knowledge to support the student in the 21st century. After all, once a graduate enters or returns to the work environment, formal education and theoretical models learned at school may or may not contribute to improve the executive's practices in ongoing management, leadership, and decision making. So this instance provides an opportunity for reflections on human centered management.

Despite the use of institutional brief exit surveys, the graduates' self-assessment of transformed habits of mind and points of view are sparsely explored. Thus, this narrative research was conducted at the school of education following doctoral standards to benchmark fellow alumnus self-reported perceptions of principled conduct based on a cross-checking of underlying goals and expectations in the program.

Experiential learning, student engagement, and learner outcomes

Graduate students seek to enhance what they know through introspection, collaboration, coursework, and research. Some universities view these students as co-learners. "When instructors assume diverse roles (e.g., guide, mentor, facilitator, discussant, [and] provocateur), they create experiential learning opportunities where adult learners practice transferable skills" (Browne-Ferrigno and McEldowney Jensen, 2012, p. 410). In view of this, the three research streams that supported this research are (a) experiential learning, (b) student engagement, and (c) learner assessments and outcomes.

Experiential learning

Universities are slowly adopting experiential learning strategies to apply them in traditional learning communities (to enhance student retention) and to facilitate coaching skills (associated with critical thinking), group discovery, and teamwork (Beachboard et al., 2011; Maher, 2004). In its simplest state, experiential learning is a reflective by-product of cognitive and kinesthetic activity.

Experiential learning focuses on andragogical theory. This theory is where the interaction of the situation, the education, and the student learner collaborate in traceable developmental instances.

Based on research from a variety of disciplines, Knowles et al. (2005) published new perspectives on core andragogical (adult learning) principles. These principles are listed below followed by examples relevant to an EdD program structure:

- the learner's need to know (promotes faculty-student collaborative learning partnerships)
- self-directed learning (taking control of learning goals and purpose, such as completing a paper or a dissertation)
- prior experience of the learner (provides depth in other learning experiences and is a depository for biases that can inhibit or shape new learning)
- readiness to learn (situations tied to one's need to know and motivation
- orientation to learning and problem-solving (adult learning style typically relies on prior experience and real-life interactions)
- motivation to learn (serving internal needs for success, choice, value, and pleasure)

In relation to adult learning, in and outside the formal classroom, experiential learning is defined as a context-specific student-centered

learning process structured around real-world settings that encourages student involvement to gain concepts, facts, and information necessary to help to create new knowledge and habits through participation, collaboration, and reflection (Mezirow, 1997; Sfard, 1998; Sumara et al., 1997).

Fink (2013) described significant learning as learning that is life-changing affecting thinking, confidence, and capacity for living a more meaningful life. He asserts that when important learning goals are integrated with learning processes, students improve self-development skills and learn how to take charge of interactions with others. Because each person places value on post-reflective learning, it follows that research should query how 21stcentury learning approaches affect the individual's sense of authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1998, 2009) and self-directed learning (Wirth and Perkins, 2013).

Student engagement

Student engagement draws upon adequate educational resources to enhance the student ability and energy to learn. In turn, a student who is engaged in studies can impact the professor's ability to motivate and create educational practicums most relevant to the student (Astin, 1984; Axelson and Flick, 2011; Taylor and Parsons, 2011; Zepke and Leach, 2010). Educational researchers conclude that student-centered engagement has a positive correlation with the likelihood of learning (Astin, 1985; Carini et al., 2006; Taylor and Parsons, 2011; Zepke and Leach, 2010), and conversely, disengagement correlates with less or a lack of learning (Taylor and Parsons, 2011). Ultimately, it is the student's task to determine the level of development and achievement (Dewey, 1929).

Fagen and Suedkamp Wells (2004) and Gardner (2007) related fundamental effects of the faculty-student relationship on aspects of the doctoral experience. O'Meara et al. (2013) researched a case of 21 graduate school faculty members and doctoral students. Faculty members, when compared with students, showed a higher rate of emotional competencies, confidence, self-motivation, self-regulation, and self-awareness and maintained higher scores in social competence, social awareness, and social skills.

The students ranked the same in self-motivation and self-awareness, but lower in self-regulation. Supposedly competent communicators and conflict managers, they ranked low in the social awareness categories of service orientation (understanding and tending to needs of others), and leveraging diversity (respect for other worldviews and challenging intolerance). Additionally, O'Meara et al. (2013) detected need for greater emphasis on the development of student self-regulation (composure, ethics, accountability, adaptability, and adopting a cosmopolitan worldview).

Owen (2012) states that a key to developing self-aware adaptive leaders necessary to lead modern organizations lies in the design of classroom environments that support and challenge students. At higher stages of leadership, students recognize their leadership and apply systems thinking and positive behavior as a part of their leadership identity.

Learner outcomes

Learner outcomes are "specific expectations of what students are supposed to know or be able to do as the result of a specific course or learning activity" (Ravitch, 2007, p. 131). Building on this definition, Webber (2012, p. 201) describes learner-centered assessment "as activities designed to foster student learning". In essence, the professor determines the lesson to be learned and coaches students to help them learn how to approach the subject matter allowing them to grasp, recommend, or enact, with the most appropriate actions based on a particular set of circumstances. Then the outcome is assessed.

Though academics are quicker to attempt transformative teaching methodologies, Newman (2012) cautions that overuse of claim for transformation has hindered the meaning of the experiences. Newman (2012) has said that most educational experiences are by-products of good and sought-after learning but not necessarily transformative.

Student transformation involves not only growth in intellect and selfdevelopment but also a passion for lifelong learning and effective citizenship. Stevens-Long et al. (2012) equate the outcome with a deep and lasting change or a developmental shift. These then become the ideal educational consequences, and, therefore, best describes the goals of transformational learning as a composite and evolving learning process (Keeling, 2004; Mezirow and Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2008).

Learner assessments and learner-centered outcomes are a new frontier for academia. Outcomes, once under the watchful eyes of bill-payer parents, now are being questioned by bill-payer adult students. The employers, the state and federal governments, and global competitive overseers do mind ineffective teaching practices that depreciate institutional worth.

Framing research

Maintaining a social constructivist orientation, a collection of personal interviews, active use of a primary archival record, and researcher field notes framed the research. As an explanatory note: The key archival document, the Drexel (2013) Keystones exists as the gold standard for the neophyte doctor of education student and is written to remain intact as a living document to sustain alumni through life.

The Keystones of the EdD (Drexel, 2013) archival document are as follows:

(1) EdD graduates possess abilities to create and support communities that are bases for sustainable change.

- (2) Leaders develop habits of mind and competencies to lead complex organizations shaped by global forces.
- (3) Leaders develop abilities to sustain their own leadership growth.
- (4) EdD graduates utilize the full range of emerging technologies to reach across generations, communicate effectively, and engage others in meaningful change.
- (5) EdD graduates exemplify the curiosity, inquiry skills, and scholarly competencies needed to investigate an idea and transform it into meaningful action.

Albeit brief exit surveys commonly serve to document graduate student self-assessed learning outcomes – this prevailing use of survey brevity provides no narrative entry to delve into the students' deeper learning experiences of transformed habits of mind and points of view; therefore, this data typically remain unidentified.

The following research questions were addressed to gain deeper understanding of this problem: (1) What do the stories of EdD alumni reveal about value creation during their university experience? (2) What do events within the stories of EdD alumni reveal about their assumption of faculty, student peers, and staff members? (3) What do the stories of alumni reveal about how their university experience may have redefined their points of view, habits of mind, or skills?

Methodology

Design

Qualitative research approach best reflects the tone of the research and the nature of central questions to be researched (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). Triangulation (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Denzin, 2012; Lunenburg and Irby, 2008) of field notes, the Keystone archival document, and participant interview data were analyzed, focusing on participant perspectives relative to their assigned meanings and context of situations (Denzin, 2001; Hatch, 2002).

Setting and sampling strategy

The selected university, Drexel University Sacramento's doctoral program offers a hybrid design that blends weekend in-class learning (attended by 10 to 20 students) with online studies. The campus is a small start-up satellite strategically and coastally opposite the parent campus. The parent university has a 125 year legacy originally established to serve the common man.

Sampling

The researcher selected a sample of 12 participants representing a broad range of ages, cultural diversity, and occupations. The pool of potential

participants available to participate in this study was limited due to the 2009 start-up status of this satellite campus. Consequently, a total of 32 participant university EdD program graduates from cohorts 1-4 were the target population. Twelve participants volunteered and were selected representing 38 percent of doctoral graduates. Due to the limited sample size, participants' age, ethnicity, and occupations were not included in the analysis. The age of participants in the sample ranged between 30 and 50, closely representing the age range of the university EdD students. Furthermore, seven women and five men aligned with the gender mix of the program's graduates. The sample represented ethnic diversity, including Caucasian, African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latino-American origins. The professional careers represented were organizational consultants, human resources administrators, state governmental administrators, K-12 educators, higher education faculty, and administrators.

Data collection and analysis

Most interviews took place on or near the university's campus. The planned time for each interview was one hour, and the time range for the interview process was between 50 and 65 minutes. Each conversation interview was audio-recorded.

Prior to the interview, the participants received a copy of the semistructured questionnaire and the EdD program Keystones. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Transcripts were coded using QDA Miner Lite freeware (Provalis Research, 2013) which allowed the researcher to import transcribed data into a case file for coding analysis. Coding was accomplished with a combination of codes fitting the data.

Findings

Participant interviews were assessed in relation to the research questionnaire. Alumni data revealed three themes: (a) value concepts, (b) social interaction, and (c) learner outcomes. A summary is presented here:

Value concepts

One of the participants entered the program with a military leadership mindset, eager that the university would deliver as per its reputation:

I wanted the program to show me that there are methodologies and approaches that the military probably never use that are effective to get individuals do things or aspiring individuals to things they wouldn't necessarily do on their own. And so, I wanted to challenge my thought processes on leadership as well.

Ten of 12 participants agreed that the program was demanding, and they expected it to be that way.

Ten alumni liked the hybrid model as a strong program attraction because it afforded "minimal time away from the family".

Only 1 of the 12 alumni speculated that a total online EdD program would have been preferable.

None of the alumni would have preferred a full-time student status.

Two participants found the Keystones, underlying program goals and expectations, to be the most significant attraction of the EdD program.

All 12 alumni cited the foundational leadership series as the most insightful, useful set of courses. The foundational leadership series infuses leadership theories with practical application on workshops, lectures, interviews, collaborative learning, and networking.

The majority of participants did not mention the integration of ethics into the curriculum. However, two valued assigned readings on ethics. One participant detected a need for ethics beyond the foundational leadership courses. One participant advocated intertwining ethics in the EdD program curriculum in the following way:

And truly understanding that we will be leaders in the community: What does it mean to be an ethical leader? Because you can have all these tools but if you are not ethical, then they are worth nothing. And we see this just throughout the world.

Social interaction

The finding explored the relationship between the EdD graduates' self-identity and connections with peers, faculty, staff, and remote cohorts.

One participant created social instances to assist fellow students in the dissertation process. During the interview, this person conveyed a genuine sense of social consciousness relating, "We, as a team, are bonded to recognize that we are here to help each other to contribute to a greater good of critical thinking in the community."

Three alumni quoted instances when assistance was needed in the team and they were pleased with the team experience.

One participant stated: "I probably had a much greater need for support from my team because I felt I needed to rely on others for help in courses that were a challenge for me."

Another participant described the team as a recharging entity, "I did enjoy face-to-faces meetings much because once in a while you could get over

burdened, but having face-to-faces meetings with the team every month was beneficial because it allowed recharging energy and getting motivated."

One participant who had struggled with "interpersonal dynamics in the team", described it this way: "how can we most effectively build a community to deal with different personalities, different agendas, different backgrounds, and the diversity of experiences that everyone brings to a team".

Visibly emotional about team difficulties one alumnus detailed:

We really never had deep conversations about race in our team. I don't think. And I think we needed to because it was definitely an issue. I'm surprised that it was an issue because everyone in the program was, super intelligent, accepting, open-minded and vet, for some reason there was a race issue that I could not understand. And I wished we would have addressed that.

One participant stated: "In the community you don't necessarily have to get along with everybody but at least to work effectively for the common good is always something that we should strive to do."

Two participants relied on their sense of determination that aided their conviction to succeed. One described it: "I didn't put much value in the team helping me. I almost saw them as a competitive situation that I wanted to do on my own and solve it myself in as an individual experience." Another mentioned befriending one classmate but otherwise, "With respect to the team in all honesty I didn't really care. For me, it was just the need to do what I need to do."

Networking as a constructive learning opportunity was the only learning approach that was accepted by all the participants. One put it this way: "I now understand that with all the opportunities we have at the university how it plays a significant role in the bigger picture of what I want to do and how to do it."

Eleven of the 12 participants highly valued face-to-face interactions with professors in class or on a one-on-one basis. Still, having experienced feelings of being "rushed" or not receiving timely feedback prompted two alumni to reflect on the anxiety of being "feedback dependent". Both recognized that the faculty members appeared overloaded with work, and they claimed that adequate coaching time had not been given to all students.

The 12 participants gave opinions about their interactions with supporting staff and perceptions were mixed: One said: "With respect to the staff, I did not feel that there was anything I needed from them. Perhaps because I ignored all the different resources we had available". Another stated: "Just staff being accessible, able to answer questions, programming questions; operational questions, more so, even about parking. My experience with staff was wonderful. They were always accessible. Someone always got back to me in a short time".

Learning outcomes

This topic was addressed by participants first in reference to university Keystones described above followed by specific learning outcomes in the program.

Different thought processes didn't happen in one class. It happened within the program. And that is valuable because many people start to think about, "What am I going to learn from this class and all classes? It's not about one class, but it is a 'stepping stone' effect and the transformation happens within the program – which is impactful".

I do a lot of reading. Now I know how to tap into resources that I may not have known before. I am constantly learning, but from a place I understand, whereas before, I was coming from a place where I was trying to grasp at straws, and I was trying to figure out what I was doing.

One participant, favoring a hard-science mentality saw problems as things in need of repair. The ability to review a change required a different approach to identifying problems and collaboration patterns to reach sustainable solutions: "Now I am excited about ambiguity because it means there is no one defined answer so I can become involved in identifying what the defined answer is".

One participant observed that aside from strong leadership qualities compassion was lacking. "I always try to see through a different lens now particularly when I find myself being judgmental or critical about something I say, 'Okay, now wait a minute'. And I'll try a different lens; I'll try a reframe".

The environment of complex situations was perceived as inspiring in the EdD program journey. Alumni value personal and professional transformations during the EdD journey. For example, one participant said about staff and faculty: "They saw growth in my leadership style. I don't know if the word is 'wisdom', but they felt that a sense of understanding had grown in me."

Every contribution, scholarly or otherwise, after degree attainment, is based on each alumnus's qualifications, self-efficacy, ability to recognize opportunity, and responsible citizenship as students experienced personal and professional growth.

One participant, a leadership management consultant, translates community needs into action in this way:

I have developed my own ability to undertake problems and view them as current realities. I now break those realities into smaller sub-problems that I can solve one at a time.

Another participant credited a sharpening of inquiry, research, and writing skills to current success in organizational effectiveness at the job:

We are working on change management in the organization, and I am part of a team that has the opportunity to develop the organization's capacity to expedite necessary changes. I am using the information, skills, and knowledge I got in the EdD program.

A participant reflected on his primary vocation and marveled how the refinement of existing skills contributed to reshaping his self-identity:

I am frequently sought after to speak at professional conferences. I am now an expert in the field relating to my dissertation topic, and I am seen as a leader at both the regional and state level. These are unexpected outcomes of the program. I look back and think "The program experience, learning, and accomplishment led me to who I am now".

One participant, who felt less practiced in adult learner teaching skills found the program to be a valuable process that provided confidence to educate organizational leaders and university students in sustainable change. The description is this:

In one of the universities where I teach, I mentioned that we cannot allow our students to think that we live in a bubble where all things in the world are immune. Often students do not understand how things that occur globally will impact young people here. So how can we prepare young people not to think exclusively of deficits and achievement gaps, but rather positively to prepare them for work within the wholeness of life?

Eight of 12 alumni moved to a new work environment. Two participants are stable in current employment and have introduced new technological functionalities in their organizations.

The data provided three themes and six findings. A matrix of themes and findings is shown in Table 15.1.

Value concepts, social interaction, and learner outcomes

The following research questions were analyzed: (1) What do EdD alumni stories reveal about value creation during the university experience?

Table 15.1 Themes and findings matrix

Themes	Findings
1. Value Concepts	(a) Challenge and rigor are key EdD program stressors that help crystallize the value of attaining a doctoral degree.(b) Program benefits and deficiencies shape the perception of graduate students to a relevant EdD program.
2. Social Interaction	(a) Self-identity and professional identity influenced EdD graduate sense of connection with others.(b) Presence of graduate student, collaborative learning teams contributes significantly to a holistic EdD program.
3.Learning Outcomes	(a) Shifting paradigms affect graduate student learning outcomes.(b) Developing scholarly competencies becomes motivational and energy spans beyond the EdD program experience.

(2) What do events in the EdD program reveal about new assumptions about faculty, student peers, and staff members? (3) What do alumni reveal about how the university experience redefines points of view, habits of mind, or skills?

These part-time EdD graduates were motivated to learn and goal-oriented to succeed in the academic quest and reflected on two core andragogical principles: readiness to learn and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2005). One alumna mentioned having had the stamina to successfully navigate the rigors of the doctoral program while valuing the discovery process. Academic rigor was vitally attractive to these graduate students.

Most of them valued the collaborative learning environment as an academic relief valve for the highly engaged part-time student and preferred applied practical learning over theoretical learning. Further, the blending of weekend in-class meetings with online classes was deemed better suited to the lifestyle of the part-time doctoral student.

Since the EdD program focused on educational leadership and management, some participants thought that the foundational leadership courses were not well aligned with adult learners who entered the program believing that their leadership skills were adequate. Ultimately, though the design and delivery of the foundational leadership courses led to the reflection that previously unconscious mental models evoked personal and professional transformations. Additionally, the leadership courses considered most valuable included those with readings that highlighted systems thinking and sustainability.

Some educational researchers related the student-faculty relationship to the concept of student engagement where students are more likely to learn when the lessons are perceived as valuable and engaging (Astin, 1984; Axelson and Flick, 2011; Taylor and Parsons, 2011; Zepke and Leach, 2010).

Learning about the contextual life-space of each participant helped to understand empathy factors. Participants assessed that the level of participation in team socialization and collaborative learning was a consequence of self-regulated preference assimilating in-class social climate and ideal learning style.

Viewing colleagues as fellow professional scholars or team members was largely absent. O'Meara et al. (2013) measured 21 doctoral students and ranked them low in social awareness of service orientation (understanding and tending to help others). This information facilitates understanding of four types of student-to-student compatibilities described in this study as solitary, pack-minded, persistence-oriented, and benevolent or pragmatic. Results suggest that EdD graduate student ability or desire to connect with peers depends on the individuals' predisposition to collaborate, place in time, and mindfulness to change. However, assessment of student peers in teams of collaborative learners is considered a pending area of alumni reflectiveness.

The study revealed that graduate student willingness to collaborate with peers was relative to the value placed on community building. Further, there is evidence that students entered the team with rigid social barriers and exited teams expressing no need for social paradigm shifts.

Educating educators may place university professors under deep scrutiny. Graduate students, in general, expect faculty members to be available to coach, co-learn, and role model. Further, to share knowledge and discuss different conduits such as experiential learning, collaborative learning, and self-directed learning methodologies. Some students noted personal transformations of teaching or leadership styles after having been exposed to more positive role modeling by the university faculty. Supporting works of Astin (1984), Fagen and Suedkamp Wells (2004), and Gardner (2007), this study supports that student-faculty engagement is a highly ranked characteristic that an institution of higher learning can offer students. Eleven among 12 participants mentioned the importance of physical presence and face-to-face interactions to stay on track, eager to do quality work, and make the experience more tangible and personable. The staff was perceived as a transparent network of enablers whose primary functions were to support faculty and expedite students' interests.

EdD students discovered that significant learning is attached to strengthened self-efficacy followed by pursuits of meaningful change. Redefined mindful habits were precursors to positive growth in self-efficacy, career advancement, and acquiring and creating employment at a level that exceeded the participants' capabilities prior to entering the program.

Curiously, participating in the educational leadership and management program did not highlight any new or redefined management skills related to growth in leadership. They explored leadership in terms of reflectiveness, mental models, and habits of mind, rather than as a list of new character traits. Dewey (1929) explained that it is a task of the student to realize achievement and development. Identity transformation was attributed to a more refined leader-scholar identity. Identity was discussed at length in relation to mindful habits. It was noted that each graduate was contributing to a particular field of knowledge based on newly acquired scholarly skills. Identity also related to the phenomenon of experiencing how the newly acquired title "Dr" can open doors.

Although the existence of academic rigor is universally expected, participants placed more value in the personal challenge of uniquely analyzing causes and softening hindrances. For example, learning to deal with ambiguity.

Management educators should note that student self-identity can contribute to tolerance for team dysfunction when condoned as a part of the scholarly challenge rather than an opportunity to strengthen one's compassionate leadership growth.

University professor influence on elucidating learner paradigms provides students with new lenses to address organizational problems with a deeper level of awareness. Reflective re-examination and shifts in mental models showed transformation in thinking and core learning. According to some students, this shift is "part of their doctoral DNA". Stevens-Long et al. (2012) equate this outcome to a deep and lasting change or a developmental shift known as transformative learning.

New awareness correlated with enlightened self-efficacy, and in turn, led to more daring self-imposed executive boundaries. Implications for these sequences are the bases for an impact model which accommodates socially oriented leadership activities. Scholarly competencies emboldened pursuits previously deemed unrealistic. Fink (2013) described significant learning as learning that is life-changing and affects thinking, improves confidence, and the capacity to live a more meaningful life.

Grounded in leadership identity development theory, Owen (2012) ranked self-efficacious behavior highest in the leadership identity development model. Leaders at this level may possess an awareness of organizational complexities and know how to contribute to the group and seek opportunities that will support professional growth. This study presented evidence of participant growth in confidence leading to rewarding actions in career change, upward mobility, or broadening responsibilities.

Limitations of the study include consideration that the literature on part-time EdD program experience is minimal. Also, research is limited by students' level of willingness to share candid, deeper reflections, about experiential learning. Participants were solicited from the initial four EdD

cohorts in a doctoral program in its first stage of implementation and refinement. Thus, these results may not be representative of other EdD programs.

Opportunities for further research include (1) the phenomenon of selfidentity frequently surfaced in the coding analysis of this study; an opportunity exists for further research exploring self-development, (2) to conduct longitudinal study with these or other participants to assess long-term learner outcomes, and (3) to extend study to doctoral graduates in other university satellites to ascertain if the experiences of these participants are representative of a larger population.

Conclusion

Executive education (EE) leadership programs continue to advance, train, and transform leaders. Nonetheless, educators cannot assess in a valid and reliable way graduates' sense of professional transformation. Therefore, executive leadership should be explored from a postgraduate professional perspective.

Taking time away from academic duties offers new knowledge. It offers time to experience and reflect on the leadership experience.

In this case, the new scholars need time to consider what sort of leader they want to become. To this end, this inquiry showed to be a useful human centered research approach to understanding how graduates perceive values and efforts or constraints associated with EE programs.

Additionally, this study provides educator assessment tools for experiential and temporal perspective. Longitudinal studies of this type are needed to assist curriculum designers with program improvement.

Finally, it is remarkable to learn that graduates, initially challenged with a commitment to the program's goals and expectations, continue to value their commitment to learned leadership habits. It follows that introducing a well-grounded code of professional principles into executive leadership programs may cultivate deeper understanding of the profession that sustains graduates beyond the formal education experience.

Ultimately, we have an obligation as human centered educators to learn jointly with our EE graduates; this adds significant value to the collective experience. Higher education programs must strive to sustain and inspire future leaders with innovative and inclusive knowledge that serves after graduation and advances their future careers within the realm of human centered mindfulness.

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