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A Model Personal Career Development Plan for Graduate Students

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People often enter a doctoral program with vaguely defined reasons for pursuing an advance degree. Perhaps more frequently than we would like to admit, the degree is seen as an end in itself. The process leading to the degree is considered rarely by students as a means for matching and developing their unique characteristics with the social, educational, and economic problems addressed by our profession. Many institutions detract further from this link between students and their ultimate social roles by specifying rigid credit hour and course requirements for the degree. Few, if any, of these requirements are based on an analysis of the problems and issues graduates will face. Moreover, in stating uniform degree requirements, institutions neglect the varying degrees of competence and experience entering students possess as well as the many possible fields of knowledge and structured experiences that could contribute to students' education.

Presented in this essay is a model Personal Career Development Plan (PCDP) for graduate students. The PCDP is meant to improve the way doctoral students and graduate faculty agree on students' programs of study. The PCDP was developed originally as the candidacy examination for the Doctor of Industrial Technology degree at the University of Northern Iowa, where it was evaluated and eventually implemented by the Department of Industrial Technology faculty during 1979. A slightly modified version of this plan currently is being tried experimentally by the authors at both the Pennsylvania State University and the University of Minnesota. While there are institutional variations in the PCDP, an overview of the PCDP is provided along with a detailed description of the procedures so as to allow a critical analysis of the intent and general process.

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The primary purpose of the PCDP is diagnostic. The PCDP process allows students to identify competencies that they already possess, and those they need to develop to function successfully in career roles they select. The PCDP requires students to provide verification to the graduate faculty that: (a) social needs exist for the career roles selected; (b) the set of competencies listed is necessary and sufficient for successful performance in their desired career roles; and (c) they have the competencies they assert they already possess. The product of a successful PCDP includes a program of graduate study for developing an articulated set of professional competencies that the graduate faculty consider for approval.

A thorough evaluation of the PCDP remains to be completed. However, experience has shown that the PCDP provides a rigorous, soul-searching activity for students by requiring articulation between their personal beliefs, goals, and expectations for graduate study and their anticipated career roles. For graduate faculty, review of the PCDP provides an opportunity to assess the sense of purpose and direction held by graduate students. Faculty members also can assess students' communications and synthesis skills, skills that often differentiate successful and unsuccessful graduate students. Identified and sequenced in Figure 1 are the general steps in the process for successfully completing the PCDP.

Format for the PCDP

The following elements are included in a written PCDP response.

1. A Control Sheet completed, where appropriate, by the student;
2. A resume of the student's experiences along with transcripts of post-secondary education experiences;
3. A statement of, and rationale for, the student's desired career role;
4. A list of competencies considered by the student to be necessary and sufficient for acceptable performance in the selected career role along with evidence of external agreement on the necessity and sufficiency of these competencies;
5. A profile and evidence of the competencies from the list already possessed by the student; and
6. A proposed program of study to develop the competencies necessary for the student to enter the selected career role.

These six elements of the PCDP are described in detail below. Appendices, portfolios, attachments, or other supporting evidence take any form considered appropriate by the student and advisor.

Control Sheet

The purpose of the Control Sheet (Figure 2) is to provide a record of contact between students and their advisors and of completion of milestones in the PCDP process.

Resume and Transcripts

The purpose for presenting these documents with the PCDP is to allow the graduate faculty to become familiar with significant details in students' backgrounds which may aid in interpreting the PCDP. Several references useful in

Overview of the Model

The PCDP is a means by which students present the rationale and substance of their programs of graduate study for review and validation by the graduate faculty.

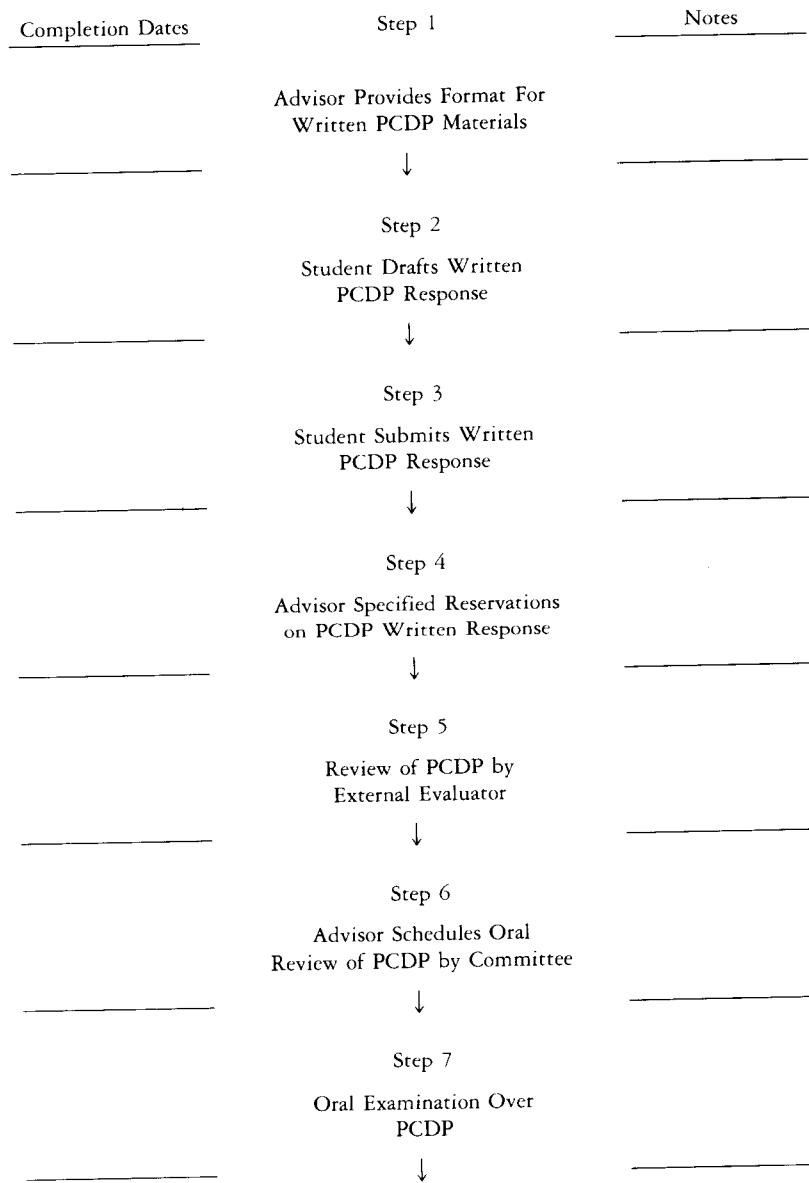


Figure 1. Personal career development plan (PCDP) process.

the development of a resume include texts by Jaquish (1968), McDaniels (1978), and Catalyst, Inc. (1976).

To Be Completed by the Student:

Student Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Degree Program M.Ed. MA Ed.D. Ph.D. None

To Be Completed by External Evaluator:

Name _____

Position _____

Social need for career role is established Yes No Questionable
 Career competencies identified are accurate and complete Yes No Questionable
 Competencies already obtained are substantiated Yes No Questionable
 Plan to obtain needed competencies is sound Yes No Questionable

Narrative Comments:

Date of Review _____
 Month Date Year

To Be Completed by Advisor and/or Committee:

Name _____

Position _____

Social need for career role is established Yes No Questionable
 Career competencies identified are accurate and complete Yes No Questionable
 Competencies already obtained are substantiated Yes No Questionable
 Plan to obtain needed competencies is sound Yes No Questionable

Narrative Comments:

Approval _____
 Month Date Year

Figure 2. Personal career development plan (PCDP) control sheet.

Desired Career Role

The career role toward which students aim must be stated clearly and with justification so that the graduate faculty can evaluate the appropriateness of students' proposed programs of study. The desired career role may be one that exists, or it may be a role for which there are no current models.

In stating a specific career role, students may reference standard occupational titles and general job descriptions such as those found in the U.S. Department of Labor's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (1978), the *U.S. Census Occupational Classifications* (1971), or in other standard reference works.

On the other hand, students may envision fulfilling a career role for which these standard occupational classifications are inadequate descriptions. For instance, career roles stated by some students might exist only in the future. A career in nationalized computer-satellite based vocational education may be one example. Moreover, students may desire a career role for which there appears to be a need in society without corresponding clear, positive employment outlook. Perhaps a current example of this would be the career role as historian of industrial education.

One way social needs are expressed in a modern economy is through employment opportunities. Therefore, students may choose to refer in their rationales to the employment outlook in the career role specified. A good source for information on employment opportunities with industry, including geographic details, is available through the Bureau of Labor Statistics' National/State Industry-Occupation Matrix System. Also, many professional groups disseminate the results of employment outlook research to their members. Students should be encouraged to view information on future employment opportunities with a healthy skepticism.

Rather than developing empirical justification, students may resort, instead, to purely *a priori* arguments to substantiate the social need for the career role they have specified. For instance, the social need for the philosopher of technology could be derived by assembling a web of seemingly disparate facts and informed opinions about various societal trends and problems to provide a compelling argument for the importance of such a philosopher's role.

Whatever method students use to present their statement of and rationale for a particular desired career role, their efforts are judged on the basis of its internal consistency as well as on the persuasiveness of the arguments presented.

Necessary and Sufficient Competencies

After students present a statement of and rationale for the career roles they desire to enter after they receive their degree, the competencies considered necessary and sufficient for successful performance in the selected career role must be listed. Problematic in the development of this list is the control of the language used to specify competencies. Because a written competency statement is an abstraction of human performance, the language used must be sufficient to summarize the desired actual performance. Therefore, some control over the language used in competency statements is desirable. A pamphlet by Fine, Holt,

and Hutchinson (1974) is a useful resource for students developing lists of competencies from "scratch."

Researchers or professional groups may have conducted analyses of competencies needed by people performing successfully in the career role selected by students. Although these competency analyses may be useful, care should be taken to expose the assumptions and limitations behind these analyses.

Evidence of the necessity and sufficiency of the list of competencies presented by students should be provided. This evidence could be assembled from, among other sources, reviews of the list by professionals who are engaged in, or provide instruction leading to, the career role specified by students or, from students' structured observations of working professionals. The graduate faculty assesses this evidence in terms of its reliability and validity.

Profile and Evidence of Competencies Possessed

Students may already possess competencies identified as necessary and sufficient for successful performance in their desired career roles. In this section of the written PCDP, students provide a profile of the competencies that they believe they already possess along with evidence that they feel will persuade the graduate faculty to agree with them.

The profile of student competencies is merely a subset of the competencies listed in the previous section of the PCDP. Evidence of possession of these competencies may take the form of description and verification of pertinent work or educational experiences. In addition, students may propose that they be administered written or performance examinations, such as those provided in specific subject matter fields in Industrial Education, developed through the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute of Albany, New York, or those provided in particular advanced sections of the Graduate Record Examination produced by Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey. The graduate faculty, after considering the written PCDP, may request additional evidence of competency from students.

Proposed Program of Study

Students should propose programs of study and development which reflect the discrepancy between the competencies identified as required for successful performance in their selected career roles and the competencies which they have been verified to possess.

There are many means other than selection of traditional courses to construct a program of development. For example, perhaps some competencies can be developed equally as well through courses or experiences offered through non-traditional methods. Internship experiences in the public or private sector are an additional means available to students. Students' advisors may be helpful in locating appropriate internship experiences; however, the students should not expect advisors to be aware of all potentially fruitful internship experiences. In particular, materials provided by Renetzky and Shlachter (1976) or the National Center for Public Services Internship Programs (1977) may be helpful to students

investigating quality internship experiences. Students should be sure to arrange for qualified faculty mentorship for any non-traditional educational experience they propose.

Summary

Criticism of the PCDP could reasonably follow three themes. First, one could take the position that graduate students are persons with very definite career goals and, thus, would find the PCDP ludicrous; second, it could be noted that the PCDP focuses on process tasks and details and not on the quality of the total program; and third, it could be argued that advisors already engage their advisees in the identical process through a few counseling sessions and extract the same end result as the PCDP with much less energy and aggravation.

The response to these criticisms is the belief that an unevenness in graduate education rigor and quality exists within our profession, both from student to student and institution to institution, and which is problematical to the profession. The format for the PCDP has a number of desirable elements. First, it allows the production of an individually-tailored program of study. Second, while allowing this flexibility, the process for the PCDP has sufficient controls to ensure that a quality program of study is developed. Minimally, the PCDP can be viewed as a tool to aid in assuring a minimum quality in graduate student degree programs.

References

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