

CMO No. 15, S. 2019: Graduate Students, Are You Ready for This?

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Abstract: *With the approval and dissemination of CHED Memorandum Order Number 15, Series of 2019 in the Philippines, graduate students both in the Master of Science/Master of Arts Academic Track and Doctor of Philosophy Academic Track/Doctor of Philosophy by Research are now compelled to publish or, at least, show evidence of acceptance of research studies in refereed journals, or nationally or internationally indexed journals. Coriat (2019) claims that the value of research to society and its relationship to wealth and competitiveness has long been established. But then, developing countries' embrace, as in the case of the Philippines, of international publishing standards has received little attention (Vuong, 2019). As a result, publication pollution is growing by the day since developing-country writers including Filipino researchers lack expertise and mentoring (Jawaid, 2016). Thereupon, this policy review brings to the fore various deterrents in the fruition of students' publications, pertinent questions than can stir waves of reflection among readers, professors, and administrators, to name a few, and mentorship as the saving grace for the emerging problems. Mentorship in this article means that the mentor and the mentee work hand in hand from research ideation to research presentation or publication.*

Keywords: *CHED Memo Order, research publication, mentorship*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum revamps have taken place in the landscape of Philippine education; it started in the basic education through the full-blown implementation of the K-12 curriculum, which, in turn, entailed curriculum changes in the higher education. Consequently, these initiatives gave birth to Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order Number 15, Series of 2019 necessitating an update in the graduate school programs in the country.

Article 1, Section 1 of the CHED Memo Order states that the environment and perspectives on graduate education have shifted substantially over the last few decades. Globalization, regional integration, internationalization of higher education, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution all require new or expanded capabilities among students to fulfill these demands. Section 2 of the said article adds that “The graduate programs focus on a particular or interdisciplinary academic discipline or profession and involves objective-options such as: evaluation and interaction with professors and peers; professional experience via internships, teaching, and research; and, production of original research or creative work.”

This paper only zooms in on the production of research which requires graduate students to gain higher competencies in knowledge production. This thrust means that students in the Master of Science or Master of Arts Academic Track must have a publication or evidence of acceptance of a research study in a refereed journal, while students in the Doctor of Philosophy Academic Track and Doctor of Philosophy by Research must have, at least, one publication or evidence of acceptance of a research study in a nationally or internationally indexed journal. Faculty members in the graduate school are no foreigners to this requirement as they are expected to show proof of publications in refereed academic journals, nationally

or internationally indexed journals or in industry/professional-based journals. In line with this, this paper lays down existing stumbling blocks in the thrust, asks thought-provoking questions, and offers ‘mentorship’ as the most viable solution because much is expected from graduate students.

DISCUSSION

Undeniably, the greatest strategy to aid students with their own knowledge-building activities is to show researchers at work, in the sweaty mess of producing knowledge, and to try out the research process itself because learning is essentially about doing that (Connell, 2019, p. 40). However, the laser-sharp focus on publishing research places a boulder in the shoulders of both students and faculty members due to their readiness and competence. Conducting research is one thing, but publishing it is a whole new level.

Coriat (2019) claims that the value of research to society and its relationship to wealth and competitiveness has long been established. But then, developing countries’ embrace, as in the case of the Philippines, of international publishing standards has received little attention (Vuong, 2019). As a result, publication pollution is growing by the day since developing-country writers including Filipino researchers lack expertise and mentoring (Jawaid, 2016).

Mentoring

Taylor and Stephenson (1996, p. 17) opined that the issue about defining ‘mentoring’ is that there are no definitions to be used as needed, and that they have not yet been compiled into a single, all-encompassing version. On one hand, mentoring is a one-on-one partnership between a mentor and the person being mentored (Hartwig, 1999). On the other hand, mentoring is defined as a method of assisting another in comprehending and learning holistically from their day-to-day experience (Bayley, Chambers, & Donovan, 2004, p. 8). In the field of research, Tan (2011) specified that mentoring is a process in which the mentor and the mentee collaborate to find truths and generate important results. By the same token, the writer of this article brings to the fore that mentoring in research means that the mentor and the mentee work hand in hand from research ideation to research presentation or publication.

There can be a number of ways to define what mentoring is, which is why there is ‘no single, all-encompassing version’. What is succinct is that mentoring is not as simple as lighting one candle after another, with the ‘knowledge flame’ never truly dying as it is continually transmitted from mentor to mentee (Pagano, 2013). Nevertheless, it is worth all the while since successful mentoring may foster a learning culture in which both the mentor and the mentee can gain knowledge (Doan, 2016).

Mentors

The mentors referred to in this article may be equivalent to ‘advisers’ in this particular CHED Memo Order. Article 6, Section 15 under ‘Adviser to Student Ratio’ specifies that “Students must be assigned an adviser at the time of admission and must be provided with the regular opportunity to communicate with their advisers not only choice of course enrollment and satisfaction of degree requirements, but other intellectual and professional concerns as well.” This ideal statement is easier stated than done. The question is “Is each graduate student assigned an adviser at the time of admission?”

A mentor may also be a professor who teaches coursework and who integrates mentorship in the teaching and learning process with the hope that graduate students will

eventually develop and foster self-directed research. The question is, “Are the professors willing to do this in their respective classes considering the number of students?”

The bitter reality is that mentors frequently have other goals and worries, such as being highly productive in research, getting money, gaining a permanent employment, search out fresh income sources, coping with enormous administrative obligations, and demonstrating accountability to numerous masters as both a teacher and a scholar that is why they may be unable to devote enough time to these tasks (Moradi, 2019; Ramsden, 2003).

There might be numerous characteristics that a mentor should possess. Notwithstanding, Archibugi (2021), Bettmann (2009), and Catanese and Shoamanesh (2017) purported the following. First, the mentor should be available. To promote gradual and consistent growth, a mentor should prioritize and organize regular sessions with the mentee. The availability of a mentor is critical, as evidenced by quick and regular responses to e-mails, article critiques, messages, and meetings. Second, the mentor should be an expert in the field. The mentor must, by definition, know the topic better than the mentee and have engaged in the epistemic community's activities. The mentor should have a track record of important research, constant publication, and invitations to conferences and seminars, among other things. Third, the mentor should be age-constraint free. Gone are the days when mentors had to be at least one generation older than their mentees. In mentorship, being intellectually established and secure surpasses age, especially if all other attributes of a good mentor are present. Finally, the mentor should be open-minded. In another light, mentors know no better path to success than their own, shaped by their own experiences. This is not to suggest they are blind to alternative options; rather, it appears that, because no one can guarantee that a plan will succeed, mentors tend to tell mentees what worked for them. The problem is that their approach may be somewhat distinct, the system may have evolved, or other factors may have taken precedence (Götz, 2019). Therefore, a mentor should be able to share her vast experience with her mentees while also encouraging, rather than discouraging, the development of new or unique styles, subjects, and approaches.

Dikilitaş and Mumford (2016) explained in their research the roles of mentors in the process. First, the mentor provides research writing focus. Mentees may have a potpourri of ideas in mind, so the mentor should be able to provide clarity as well as support in choosing a suitable research focus. Second, the mentor provides language support. Although there are tools to help students in the language department, the mentor could offer guidance in creating neutral, formal style in writing research papers. Third, the mentor provides pedagogic input which denotes that she supports the mentee's paper for overall research article structure, appropriate language, and academic conventions, e.g. referencing. Fourth, the mentor provides moral support or motivation. Research writing can be extremely exhausting - physically, emotionally, and mentally. Sometimes, mentees are left feeling overwhelmed. In consequence, the mentor may offer ongoing encouragement to write and the reassurance in the value of writing. Overall, the mentor's role is present from finding the mentee's initial focus to the final written product.

According to Wright-Harp and Cole (2008), the ideal research mentor is someone who is willing to help mentees improve their research abilities and increase professional self-confidence by allowing them to present and publish their work. The findings have to be taken to the people who can use them because this effort builds the knowledge archive. Connell (2019, p. 23) explains that it is an essential part of the research process since presenting and publishing mentees' work are all used to communicate with other scholars.

Paper Presentation

Participating in conferences, whether by providing keynote speeches and papers, presenting posters, chairing sessions, or serving in the scientific committee, is critical to

increasing the exposure of a laboratory's research and individual scientists' careers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002). The oral presentation of papers at an academic conference is one of the most important ways for information to spread through the academic discourse community (Hood & Forey, 2005).

In this case, the mentor should train her mentees the nuances on how to pitch their papers in institutional, regional, national, or international conferences or research grants. One may ask “Has the mentor tried presenting his/her paper in a conference, or has the mentor, at least, tried being a paper evaluator in a conference?” After all, *Gadbois and Graham (2012) perceived that a mentor shares professional and personal experience, functions as a ‘sounding board,’ provides guidance and advice, and helps prepare students for the work they are currently doing and for their career responsibilities in the future.*

Paper Publication

Another way to communicate research studies is through paper publications. There are caveats, though. When under pressure to publish, graduate students may hesitate to investigate tough topics or highly specialized local concerns that are less likely to be approved for publication (Jordão, 2019). Landgrave (2019) additionally explains that students' single-minded concentration on publishing at any cost exposes them to exploitation. One form of exploitation could be of students falling prey to predatory journals or publishers due to the proverbial “publish-or-perish” nature of graduate school with respect to the new CHED Memorandum Order.

The consensus definition reached on predatory journals and publishers by Grudniewicz et al. (2019) was “Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices.” This incident resonates with the study of Kurt (2018) when the participants expressed that they lacked proper supervision and believed they lacked the scientific competence to submit their papers to more reputable journals. Mentors can, then, fill this gap by educating graduate students how to spot predatory journals or publishers and by discussing concepts like refereed journals, indexed journals, among others. The question is “Do the professors themselves have a know-how, or have they published research articles in refereed, or nationally/internationally indexed journals?”

Snoek (2019) recommends mentors to include students early in the publication process by encouraging them to participate to their mentors' ongoing work. In this situation, the students have a secure environment in which to learn about the often cruel publishing system before they face the pressure of publish-or-perish. The question is that “In case graduate students help out in the research endeavors of their mentors, what policies are crafted to protect them from simply being ghost writers of their mentors?”

To reiterate, Article 3, Section 8, under ‘Summary Matrix of Graduate School Programs’ states that a major requirement and a student output is a publication or publications in a refereed journal or in nationally/internationally indexed journal. The term ‘publication’ in this regard paves the way for various interpretations. Hence, mentors should not only teach and guide students in the creation of Original Research Articles (ORA), but also open doors in the composition of Pilot Studies, Systematic Review Articles, Book Reviews, Perspective Articles, or Opinion Articles with a publication in mind. The hindrance is the dearth of rigorous study to identify new and better techniques for assisting students in learning the ropes in these kinds of possible publications (Bok, 2020, p. 128). The question is that “Do faculty members have expertise or experience in these categories that graduate students can explore on for publications?”

All in all, it would be useful for university mentors to undergo training on how to equip future researchers with the requisite research abilities (Akyürek & Afacan, 2018). Equally important is equipping faculty members who handle graduate school classes to be presenters and researchers themselves. At the end of the day, there is a grain of truth in the Latin clause “Nemo dat quod non habet” which means “You cannot give what you do not have.”

Mentees

Mentors are indispensable in the process of publication, but it is vital to take into account that mentees share the same responsibility, if not more, in the process. Mentees must let themselves to be "mentorable," which requires them to demonstrate respect, humility, patience, and flexibility in the relationship (Lee et al., 2015)

In addition to being ‘mentorable’, Bettmann (2009) identified five characteristics of successful mentees. First is having a clear definition of the support and help that mentees think they need. Although mentors can be a beacon in the process, the mentee must be able to ask relevant questions so that the mentors can also share definite answers, and the mentee must be assertive enough to express what they need or want, i.e. confusion in the appropriate research design to be used, to name a few. The direction, at the end of the day, is set by the mentee. Second is the recognition that one person cannot help the mentee meet all the mentoring needs. As has been established, mentors juggle a multitude of things from their professional to personal lives, so the mentee must have the initiative to seek help from other able individuals. They could be faculty members from another department, college, or school, trusted associates in the workplace, or friends in the academe who are willing to share their two cents and to address disparate concerns. Third is the ability to accept and work through meaningful criticisms. It is possible to receive relatively harsh feedback from evaluators, editors, or reviewers from presentations or publications that is why being under the tutelage of a mentor can help thicken the skin of the mentee for future criticisms and/or rejections. In short, the mentees are being prepared for the worst. Fourth is the interest in working with mentors to help the mentee grow. This burning interest is cultivated through being proactive in contacting the mentor, scheduling future encounters, treating the mentor ethically, and being considerate of the mentor's sentiments. Lastly, the commitment to make an effort to enable the relationship to develop and function. Like in any kind of relationships, the mentor-mentee relationship in the research process needs constant work. On the side of the mentee, she has to establish defined objectives and expectations for the mentoring relationship, convey what the mentee wants from the relationship, maintain distinct boundaries, and grasp what the mentor expects.

CONCLUSION

High quality mentorship is incredibly important for success at all levels of an academic career. The recommendations of Ocobock et al. (2021) for graduate students are to focus mainly on finding mentors and maintaining a good mentor-mentee relationship. In the previous research of Fedynich and Bain (2011), the authors found a direct correlation between faculty mentorship, the connection of students with program and faculty, and graduate success.

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) Number 36, Series of 1998 and CMO Number 9, Series of 2003 needed to be updated or revised to adequately address and meet the requirements of the current times, which is why CMO No. 15, Series of 2019 was born. With its creation come great expectations from graduate students, both in the masters’ and doctoral levels.

In every reform, problems arise, which need to be redressed as early as possible before they get worse. Ergo, this paper attempted to shed light on the current landscape and the stumbling blocks as regards the publication of graduate students as necessitated by CHED Memorandum Order Number 15, Series of 2019. Second, the paper asked pertinent questions that readers, professors, and administrators, just to name a few, can ponder upon. Finally, the paper put forward ‘mentorship’ as the long-term solution. In order to advance the research work of students in their various fields of expertise, they must be capacitated in the process whereby mentorship can come in. The efficacious mentors can aid in the difficulty, the frustrations, and the dilemma of students in putting their research out in the knowledge economy. As Hall and Liva (2021) perfectly wove in words, graduate student mentorship is an important component of successful university experiences, especially better student retention, completion, and satisfaction.

In a nutshell, mentorship is designed to stimulate discussion about important relationships – between research and education, between diverse people and their different knowledge horizons, and between academia and wider communities (Fung, 2017).

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