



Doctoral formation in Education in Mexico. Jesuit style

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Abstract

The Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación (DIE) reached 15 years of age. After a decade and a half of collegial work and a solid process of accompaniment, we can openly say it is a good practice from four Jesuit universities in Mexico. Starting in Puebla, Mexico City, and Guadalajara and expanding to León, the DIE shows how a group of scholars can be demanding but not rigid. The collegiality seems to be the program's trademark and a genuine interest in helping students achieve their best in a process of accompaniment that has become part of the program's culture.

Introduction

How do you prepare researchers to address both structural and specific issues in education? Moreover, how do you prepare them in accordance with the Jesuit principles? These questions were addressed in early 2005 by a handful of academics located at Ibero Puebla, Ibero CDMX (Mexico City), and ITESO in Guadalajara. The answers given to these questions were uncertain, tentative, a bit shaky, but proven correct. In the Fall 2005 semester, the "Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación" was born, and the first generation was on its way to the maiden voyage of a Jesuit-interinstitutional program that has proven successful and deeply enriching. The following paragraphs will present a brief sketch of its history and key moments, as well as the features that make it a good practice. The very last section of the text will summarize its salient elements as a Jesuit-inspired educational practice.

History

In early 2005, authorities from three Jesuit universities in Mexico gathered to discuss the idea of strengthening an interinstitutional effort called "Campo Estratégico de Acción de Modelos y Políticas Educativas" better known as CEA-MOPE (a rough translation to English would be: Task group on educational policies and models). This group gathers scholars from most of the Jesuit universities in Mexico, analyzes current developments in education, and prepares brief studies on key topics and briefings for the authorities to help them make decisions. The main conclusion of the meeting in 2005 was that Jesuit Universities would greatly benefit from the launching of a doctoral education program, which would create a larger critical mass to support the CEA-MOPE and the Jesuit universities. Once the decision was made, scholars from Ibero CDMX, Ibero Puebla, and ITESO devised a flexible and research-intensive curriculum inspired by a successful experience lead by the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes and other public universities.

The first generation (2005) totaled 22 students in the three universities; the second cohort (2007) included 25 students in the same three institutions. For the third cohort (2010), the joint program included a sister university: Ibero León, which strengthened the doctoral program and enhanced the student intake to 35. The fourth (2012) was a very special cohort because the doctoral program received the stamp of approval as a Quality Program (Programa Nacional de Posgrados de Calidad or PNPC) by the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT). It recognized the program's high quality in terms of attrition, publications, and a careful mentoring process based on personal accompaniment. Being part of the PNPC was the much-needed push for growth both in academic and enrollment terms because it provides federally sponsored scholarships for students. We had 38 students and a steadily growing production of knowledge published by top tier journals. The fifth-generation (2015) was probably the first of the new "consolidated" era, with 48 students was the largest and required more scholars to function correctly. The sixth (2018) was also large but, after careful consideration over the fear of overstretching, we accepted

only 43 students, who are progressing fine and will start graduating by late 2021 or early 2022.

In brief, the results are promising, with overall graduation nearing 80% and an on-time rate of 66%.

Cohort	Accepted	Graduated	% graduated/ accepted	Graduated on expected time	% graduated on expected time
2005	22	18	81	13	59
2007	25	20	80	16	64
2010	35	28	80	28	80
2012	38	27	71	25	65
2015	48	36	75	31	64
2018	43	0	0	0	0
Total	211	129		113	

This effort has required intensive coordination at the interior of the four universities as well as among them. The next section will describe some of the standard practices that have shaped the program and its results.

Key features of the program

The doctoral program, as most doctoral efforts, requires many interlocked processes. This section will refer briefly to the three most salient: 1) selection of students, 2) mentoring and monitoring students, and 3) research thesis and graduation process.

The selection of the candidates is very collegial and careful. It is a long process and starts with establishing a "selection committee" in every institution, followed by a careful analysis of the dossier the candidate presents. Once the candidate's file is analyzed, the applicant has to go through two interviews with faculty members who will screen her/his skills, conditions, and purposes for pursuing a doctoral degree. Once all the candidates are screened, the committee gathers to determine which applicants can and cannot be accepted and best served by the faculties. Each university comes up with a list of accepted candidates and possible tutors (scholars who will direct the student throughout her/his

doctoral studies) and shares it with the other three institutions to elaborate a consolidated list. This last part of the process can accommodate changes and additions like "borrowing" a faculty member from one sister institution to serve the intellectual needs of a student.

The mentoring and monitoring is intensive since it is crucial in the student's success and the program. For us it is the key process of accompaniment. Once the cohort starts courses, the student will meet with her/his tutor once every week and join a "comité temático" or thematic committee, which usually consists of four students conducting research on similar topics. This strategy of placing students in committees structured by common themes has proven very successful in creating a support network in both academic and personal realms.

The committee convenes for six semesters (second to seventh) in January and June to monitor the development of the students' projects. These meetings receive the name of "Seminario de Evaluación" and require the student to submit the text of the research thesis she/he is developing to all committee members, including students and tutors. Once the committee convenes, the session's mechanics, despite some variations, usually include a brief exposition by the student on the project's status and a lengthy conversation of the student with all the committee members about what they have already read, heard, and reflected upon. All students in each committee have to go through this process and are deemed by current and former graduate students as one of the program's key components. They frequently label the Seminarios as "collective tutoring", and although it is not correct since there is no such thing as collective tutoring, it is understandable how receiving focused and supported feedback from scholars and fellow students can be interpreted as such.

The third salient process deals with the construction of the research process and the graduation. As mentioned in the previous process, the committee plays a key role in cementing academic relations among students and scholars. After going through several exchanges during the first seven semesters, they are all acquainted with the projects and the strengths and weaknesses of the students. After the seventh semester, there is no "Seminario de evaluación" since individual students are finishing their research. Nevertheless, for the "Seminario de Ajuste" (the evaluation mechanism before the final exam) and the degree exam, the student will meet again with one of the faculty members

who worked in her/his committee. The exam's synod will consist of three persons: 1) the tutor, 2) a former committee member, and 3) an external scholar to the program and the institutions. This configuration permits a combination of strengths since they all are knowledgeable of the discipline but have different levels of the acquaintance of the project. Once the Seminario de Ajuste takes place, the synod and student agree on the number of weeks she/he will need to fulfill the required adjustments. After a careful and collegial revision of the text, the Examen de Grado takes place.

The abovementioned processes are key and are supported by several others that provide certainty to the actors in the core processes. It is not ventured to state that the accompaniment is supported by a key feature characterizing all interlocked processes: collegiality.

Collegiality is the doctoral program's key feature.

Most if not all the program decisions are collegial and involve a large number of meetings and frequent communication. To exemplify this point, we will briefly mention a few starting with the decision-making mechanisms' structural conformation and finishing with a current example.

In each institution, we have the "Consejo Técnico," which frequently meets during the semester and includes the current coordinator, the past coordinator, an experienced faculty member, the department chair, and one graduate student. This Consejo convenes to analyze how the cohort is advancing and makes decisions in order to solve problems. The program also has two other groups of scholars: 1) the Colegio de Coordinadores and 2) the Comisión Académica Interinstitucional. The former includes the coordinator of each of the four institutions and oversees the program's development as a whole, meeting frequently. The Comisión Académica Interinstitucional or CAI is the supreme decision-making organism responsible for approving changes to rules, manuals, and other regulations. The CAI convenes every six months after the Seminario de Evaluación mentioned paragraphs above and analyzes how the Seminario went and ratifies or rectifies the evaluation of the students and the grades assigned to them.

One last element, which exemplifies the culture of collegiality, resides in the committees for the Seminarios de Evaluación mentioned in the previous section. They have three mandatory features: 1) has to include students and faculty members from at least two of the universities, 2) has to include at least three faculty members, and 3) the grades the committee assigns have to be assigned as an agreement. The top-grade (10 in Mexico) and a "fail" grade have to be assigned by consensus. After 15 years of existence, this and other practices have permeated into the "culture" of the program.

The Jesuit touch

Finally, it is essential to highlight how the Jesuit philosophy and fundamental principles are inextricably linked to the doctoral program. The first and foremost element resides in the notion that "To educate" is to foment through a social process how a person can achieve the realization of her/his potential". Our program understands its primary goal as setting the stage and the conditions for the person's development. It is her/his responsibility to perform and provide her/him with the appropriate challenge and support. We, as scholars, members of a Jesuit community, strive to foster creativity, criticism, freedom, solidarity, conscious and responsible. Therefore, we look for ways to provide always adaptive challenges that would help our students to achieve the best they can at the moment, trusting they will make a sincere effort to improve her/his conditions and the community.

A sort of conclusion

There is no perfect program, and there are not perfect scholars or human beings, nor perfect institutions. We all look every day for a continuous and steady improvement. The current coordinators are happy but not contempt with the practices we, as a collective of more than 50 scholars, have developed.

The 15 years of continuous operation, 211 students, 129 graduates, 51 faculty members, and a dozen administrative colleagues tell us we are on the right track. However, we must concentrate on making the right choices based on contributing to everyone's achievement and service to our communities.

For more information: <https://posgrados.iteso.mx/doctorado-interinstitucional-educacion>



