Introduction

A study was conducted to evaluate the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Program at Morehead State University. The program is in its ninth year, and the only program evaluation to date was a pilot evaluation study in 2017. Both the current and previous evaluations were designed as a part of program review. The objective was to gather information on whether graduates of the program felt the program’s goals had been met. In the 2017 pilot study, specific program goals were pulled out from the Doctoral Handbook (Morehead State University, 2016) and questions were formulated from those goals. Upon reporting the pilot study goals and in conjunction with the EdD program administrators, the faculty insights and 2017 pilot study results were combined to develop the questions for this follow-up study.

Methods

An objective-oriented evaluation was conducted. “The distinguishing feature of an objectives-oriented evaluation approach is that the purposes of some activities are specified, and then the evaluation focuses on the extent to which those purposes, or objectives, are achieved.” (Fitzpatrick, Sanders and Worthen, 2012) This was chosen because it fit the needs of the project. A total population sampling method was used. “Total population sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique that involves examining the entire population (i.e., the total population) that have a particular set of characteristics (e.g., specific attributes/trait, experience, knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, etc.).” (Laerd Dissertation, 2012) This was the best method because there was access to a list of graduates and students and direct contact with them was possible. The study was sent to all 88 graduates; nine responded. The survey was created and sent using Google forms. Google Forms was ideal because it was an easily accessible format, easy to distribute, and easy to obtain the responses. The study had 5 items.

1. Rank the core courses based on their effectiveness for you and in your program.
2. You were all required to participate in a summer program. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this program?
3. How did your experience in Morehead State’s Educational Doctorate program affect your employment?
4. Describe and explain the employment changes if there were any.
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the program going forward?

Results

Item 1

The results of the study were overall positive. Table I shows the survey results for the first item. The courses will have a tally for each response indicating if the participants found it effective or ineffective. Not every participant marked every course, so some courses will have more tallies than others. Only 2 of the courses, 808 and 811, were ranked as less than effective. One respondent claimed 808 was ineffective due to it’s focus on K-12 law and the fact that not all of the students worked in the K-12 school system. For those in higher education, this class was not helpful and ineffective. 811 was claimed to be less effective than it could have been. One respondent stated that they did not learn as much from the course as by doing the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Could be better</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>801</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>804</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>805</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>808</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>810</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>811</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item 2

The response to the summer program was very positive. Every response mentioned the relationships gained through the summer program and how beneficial those were for their individual success. The only weaknesses that were mentioned about this program were that it can be difficult for the students to be there with travel costs, jobs, and families. Also, one respondent suggested that each different cohort have a different schedule and activities. This particular part of the summer program has been addressed and changed since this student graduated.

Item 3 & 4

Most of the respondents were affected by their EdD degree. The benefits of this program for them included getting a new position, getting a pay raise, and improving the educational experiences of the students and teachers at their school. Though over half of the respondents claimed to have their employment affected, not everyone felt it was so. For some of those, this was a personal rather than professional challenge. Others though have been unsuccessful in their attempts to gain better employment.

Item 5

There were several suggestions for the program as it moved forward. The suggestions included adding more face-to-face meetings, the international trip should be renewed, and one respondent wrote that they felt the program was more about instructional design than education technology. The most frequent suggestion, though, was for the leadership within the doctoral program to be proud of it. Some of the respondents felt that their hard work, time, and money was not being valued by those in charge. “You have a good program. … Be proud of that fact.”

Conclusions

Due to the extremely low response rate of just over 10% and the fact that this was a total-population survey, general conclusions about the program are impractical. The small sample size was not representative of the whole population.

Limitations

• Only 9 out of 88 people responded to the survey.
• Some respondents completed less than 100% of the survey.
• Since “email” was a required field during the first week of the survey, the Hawthorne Effect might have skewed the results. “The Hawthorne Effect refers to any situation in which the experimental conditions are such that the mere fact that individuals are aware of participating in an experiment…improves their performances.” (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007)

Recommendations for Future Studies

• In the next study, the response rate might be increased by putting implementing measures to support a larger response rate. Giving more time to collect responses or giving some kind of incentive are two ways this might be achieved.
• Questions should be designed to communicate the desired response more clearly.
• Name or email should be an optional field, so that the Hawthorne Effect does not interfere.
• Some of the negative responses don’t need to be addressed in a future study because those aspects have been revised since those students completed the program.

References


What I learned about research

Sample size and response rate matter

The population that we sent this survey to consisted of 88 graduates from the EdD program. Only 9 of those graduates responded. There is no way of knowing if this small sample size is representative of the whole population of EdD graduates. With a response rate of only 10.2%, our results are not generalizable or conclusive. “Response rates around 70% or higher are generally considered acceptable.” (Johnson, R. B. & Christensen, L. 2014) Since the survey was a voluntary response, it is possible that the only people who responded were those that had particularly strong feelings about the program which can skew the results. With such a small number of people, any slight deviation among the population makes a very large impact.

Even the best designed research can’t be controlled

It does not matter how well you set your study up or how carefully you choose your population, your results are determined by voluntary participation. As a researcher, the only thing you can do is reach out to the population and hope that those in the population will be willing to participate.

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Could be better</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>801</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>804</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>805</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>808</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>810</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>811</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>