

## A PhD Student Manifesto<sup>1</sup>

*Manifesto*: Public declaration of principles and intentions, usu. political, artistic or technological [From *manifesto (Italian)*, itself from *manifestum (Latin)*] 1. Clear; 2. Conspicuous.] First recorded use in English: [Nathaniel Bent](#)'s translation of [Paolo Sarpi](#)'s *History of the council of Trent (1620)*

For the curious, committed, intense scholar, a doctorate from the University of Utah's David Eccles School of Business (hereafter, DESB) leading to a faculty position, is the perfect career path. It is our experience that, occasionally, applicants to the doctoral program, and even admitted doctoral students, are ill-informed and misinformed with regard to: (i) the process of navigating through the program to a successful career, (ii) faculty expectations for doctoral students, and (iii) how to manage relationships with faculty. This document summarizes some of the hard-earned wisdom of faculty members who have collectively made most of the mistakes listed in this document (and survived to tell the tales). This document is intended to help you, the incoming PhD student, succeed in the doctoral program at the University of Utah.

1. **The Doctoral Distinction**: The DESB PhD degree is distinguished from other degrees in several dimensions.
  - (i) The stated goal of both the student and the faculty is that, upon graduation, the student can function as an independent researcher and teacher. The graduating student is expected to be a world-class expert in his/her chosen areas of scholarship.
  - (ii) The average length of a doctorate is 5 years, which is substantial time. Barring serious and unforeseen setbacks in the dissertation phase of the PhD, a student should not need more than 5 years to complete his or her PhD.
  - (iii) Unlike other degree programs in which students pay a hefty tuition, most students are provided tuition benefits and a stipend to help support them during the program. If one also counts the heavy commitment of faculty and other school resources, each PhD student is a major investment for the school.
  - (iv) Professors are aware that PhD students, unlike any other, are their future *colleagues*. Professors are (or should be) the students' role models.
  - (v) A PhD student's success hinges critically on the student's relationships with faculty within the student's area of specialization, and especially, the advisor.

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By “success”, we mean productivity within the program, completing a thesis and graduating, and, finally, finding a faculty position that facilitates a lifestyle devoted to research and teaching.

2. **Selection:** The doctoral program at the DESB is very selective. In each area of specialization, 2-3 students (and usually fewer) are admitted most years, so that faculty can provide individual attention to the students. The selection standards are becoming progressively more difficult as the School’s PhD program gains even more recognition and as the quality and size of the applicant pool increase. Admission is a privilege and an honor.
3. **Mission:** The doctoral program at the DESB is a very research-intensive program, designed to produce scholars who do *world-class* research *and* teach. Our mission is to graduate PhDs who obtain faculty positions at our peer research institutions. The emphasis on research (in addition to the ability to teach) is a critical, distinguishing factor of our program.
4. **Goal congruence:** Graduating doctoral students, wiser after their roughly 5 years in the program, sometimes choose (a) a job in industry, or (b) a ‘teaching’ position, i.e., a job as a lecturer at a teaching institution with a lesser commitment to research. These alternative paths, albeit not preferred by the DESB for its graduates, are inevitable if the student discovers that he/she is ill-suited by temperament or ability for research. Nonetheless, given the high research expectations, the DESB PhD program would be a poor choice for the incoming doctoral student who has these career paths in mind.

Other PhD programs, focused on the goal of a teaching career (where a PhD may help) are more suited to the candidate interested in pursuing a teaching path. In our frank assessment, a research-focused PhD program like the DESB’s is substantially more demanding (in several dimensions) than the alternative.

Thus, at least at the time of admission into our program, the doctoral student’s goal should be to learn how to be a world-class researcher and scholar. If the student does not have this goal from the outset, our doctoral program would be a poor fit, leading to mutual unhappiness and frustration.

5. **Time commitment:** Like most PhD programs, our program is full-time and does not allow for students to work outside of the PhD program. The program requires a greater time commitment, and far greater intensity of effort, than many full-time jobs. At a minimum, you should plan on 50 hours or more a week towards your PhD. Moreover, we expect that you as a student are available during regular business hours for course-work, research seminars, teaching/research assistantship work, meetings with faculty and research collaboration. Any level of commitment

less than that described herein and you will most probably not finish your PhD, or your dissertation work will be of insufficient quality to place well in academia.

6. **Managing relationships with faculty:** As stated above, success in the PhD program hinges on strong working relationships with faculty in your Department, and above all, with your advisor and other members of your committee.
  - a. While commitment at the level of a full-time employee is non-negotiable (see pt. 5 above), the program does provide flexibility in several dimensions, including a flexible schedule, especially after completing your course-work. Nevertheless, collaborating with faculty on research is critical, so it is important that faculty with whom you frequently interact be aware of vacation or travel plans as early as possible, so they can budget their time commitments appropriately.
  - b. Discuss the right choice of courses prior to each semester with your advisor and doctoral program coordinator.
  - c. **FIND** an advisor reasonably early on. Don't be afraid to explore working with faculty as early in the program as possible. Faculty usually welcome students' interest and initiative.
  - d. **Teaching / Research Assistantships:** The relationship between the PhD student and the faculty is an apprenticeship. Being a teaching or research assistant (TA/RA) is a privilege, and a critically important part of the apprenticeship relationship, since you get the opportunity to observe how a faculty member functions at close quarters. This implies reciprocal responsibilities. If you are a teaching or research assistant (TA/RA) either in the current semester or the next, it is imperative that you coordinate with the concerned faculty members on any vacations or trips you have planned. Let the appropriate faculty member know as much in advance as possible about your availability during and between semesters. Careless treatment of the opportunity to serve as a teaching or research assistant can lead to corrosion of the relationship with the student's advisor and dissertation committee members, with grave consequences to his/her PhD and career.
  - e. Faculty support for their doctoral students includes advising doctoral students, training and working with them, supporting their dissertation work, writing recommendation letters and helping doctoral students obtain jobs as Assistant Professors in the best possible school they can get. These activities are extremely time-consuming but critical to PhD students' success. It is important, therefore, that you earn faculty/advisor goodwill. It is impossible to 'repay' a good advisor for his/her help, but looking for

opportunities to be of use (e.g. providing feedback on documents, grading, helping design exams, being sensitive to faculty time during research collaborations, etc.) is a great way to express appreciation. Faculty will appreciate your efforts and will generally reciprocate by providing you additional time and feedback. It is in your advisor's and the Department's best interests that you do well, so they are anxious to help you achieve your goals if you are similarly motivated. Accordingly, look for opportunities to be useful to your potential advisor and other faculty in your department.

7. **Managing relationships with other PhD students:** Success in academe hinges on developing a strong network of like-minded scholars. The academic community is generally small and close-knit. As a community of scholars we support one another directly and indirectly in research and in decisions regarding promotion and tenure. The relationships you develop with other PhD students form the foundation of a PhD student's network. Other PhD students are potential collaborators in your research. It is important that you use the PhD program as an opportunity to begin to develop a reputation as a constructive and supportive member of the academic community.
8. **Students with industry experience:** If you have been away from academia for a while, your academic skills might have become rusty. For example, there is a huge emphasis on quantitative / analytical /statistical skills in several of the areas of specialization. There is a natural process during your coursework and early research, by which these skills will return. Faculty have long experience with doctoral students and are well aware of this progression. You have been admitted because faculty have confidence in your potential to overcome these roadblocks and be successful. Be patient and work hard, and you will prosper.

*This information has been put together to help prospective and current doctoral students make the right career choices. Above all else, the critical factor for a productive, successful tenure in the DESB PhD program is goal congruence: If in your honest assessment, the information provided above is consistent with your goals, then the PhD program at the David Eccles School of Business, University of Utah is the right choice. The faculty are excited that you have been admitted and look forward to working and collaborating with you.*

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