

# Training for an international academic career: Structuring a successful PhD program in Romania

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**Abstract:** The worldwide demand of young academics has constantly expanded throughout the last decades. The minimum requirements for entering the global academic labor market have increased and PhD students need to rise up to the expectations of a progressively demanding profession. This paper aims to fill the gap emphasized by several recent studies, which have voiced the need to improve the international competitiveness of Romanian higher education institutions (HEIs). By employing a participative observation study approach, we analyze the characteristics and structure of French business schools' doctoral programs and provide a model of PhD training adapted to the current requirements of the international academic market. Moreover, we highlight the manner in which the curricula adjustments need to be accompanied by additional implementation programs and we underline the need for Romanian universities to make a clear distinction between PhDs and professional doctorates. Along with proposing an integrated model of doctoral training that can raise the international visibility of Romanian PhD programs, we discuss the potential long-term benefits of implementing this model.

**Keywords:** higher education, internationalization, PhD programs, academic labor market, academic career

**JEL classification:** A23, D83, I21, I23, I25, J21, J23, J24, J31, J45, J61.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, the academic world went through numerous transformations that have modified the characteristics, structure and objectives of HEIs. A higher education market has emerged and as a result, universities and business schools had to engage in major developments in order to become highly competitive, attain leadership, or merely survive in the academic environment (Kogan *et al.*, 1994). Extant literature attributes special importance to doctoral programs. Being incubators for the production of future academics (Kalifa & Quattrone, 2008), which can take the form of researchers or research trainees (Djelic, 2008), multiple inquiries emerged on how these doctoral programs change the behavior of individuals (Pelger & Grottke, 2015), increase the focus of certain academic activities (Gendron, 2015) and lead to the standardization of the higher education environment (Willmott, 2011).

The current level of preparation required from a young student facing its first academic employment is substantially higher compared to 20 years ago (Group of Eight, 2013). The PhD graduates need to show both high research and teaching qualities. In most Western-European countries they are expected to find a job position as assistant professors within a higher education institution different from the one whose PhD program they graduated from. Moreover, if we refer strictly to business schools, the PhD graduates are strongly encouraged to obtain their first employment outside their home country.

This institutional pressure increases the competitiveness of the academic job market, requiring an international approach in structuring the PhD programs. Yet, as several authors have shown (Curaj *et al.*, 2012; Ilie *et al.*, 2012; Potolea *et al.*, 2013), Romanian HEIs have failed to succeed in internationalizing their programs and for the moment settled with molding the higher education legislation to the European requirements. Consequently, without an adequate PhD program that strives to prepare individuals for a global market of higher education, the Romanian PhD students have not been able to establish an international image and their presence on the European or American academic job markets is significantly low.

Therefore, in this paper we advance the debate on modernizing the Romanian PhD programs. We start from analyzing why the Romanian higher education system is not internationally competitive and identify which are the characteristics this system is lacking. We identify several issues and provide new avenues for improvement, arguing that skills of doctoral students can be improved through training programs. Specifically, we propose a curricular model to enhance the quality of Romanian PhD programs based on a French PhD training example. As it recently went through major transformations meant to develop the French HEIs competitiveness at an international level, the French higher education system is a

good starting point of analysis and represents a good model for the development of Romanian HEIs.

Aside from the aforementioned curricula improvements, we draw attention to the fact that in order to be successful, the application of the model needs to be accompanied by a careful guidance of PhD students. Specifically, we refer to the duty of senior faculty members to make the PhD candidates aware of the “big picture” of the academic environment and supervise them closely while they develop their research and pursue the publication of their work (Beyer *et al.*, 2010). In the absence of these intrinsically important inputs, any curricular advancement is going to lack substance. Although in this paper we make a direct reference to the French model, we advise against a mimetic strategy and highlight the need of implementation according to local characteristics and specificities.

Currently, the research activities performed by Romanian HEIs are mostly described by a state of ‘short-termism’ (Albu & Albu, 2012) that is in stark contrast with the long-term characteristics of a modern doctorate programs (Djelic, 2008). As result, we find the Romanian higher education system to be an ideal setting for the implementation of a new type of doctoral training that can aid graduates to perform high quality research and improve other academic skills.

The current model of Romanian doctoral programs was enacted in 2005 (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010) and follows the Bologna model (Curaj *et al.*, 2012). The Romanian doctorate spans over a 3-year period, with possibility of extension for maximum 2 years (Law no. 288, 2004). While the research courses that doctoral students are required to follow are relevant from a curricular perspective, they are broad in nature and do not contribute to a thorough theoretical and methodological preparation of the PhD candidates. They are introduced to general theoretical concepts pertaining to each field (e.g. management, governance, accounting) without undergoing a detailed analysis of contemporaneous research topics (e.g. social network analysis, asset pricing, structuration theory). This practice is not beneficial for the PhD candidates, as the coursework is not meant to be useful from the perspectives of academics or practitioners.

Relative to other European countries, the current Romanian model blends the research oriented and professional oriented doctorates into one category (Potolea *et al.*, 2013). For a short period, between 2005 and 2011, a split was made amid scientific and professional doctorates (Government Decision nr 567, 2005), but only for arts and sport disciplines. Since 2011, the government reinstated the previous form of doctoral studies and formally defined them to provide high education training with R&D and innovation objectives (Government Decision no. 681, 2011).

According to a recent Government Decision (nr 94 from 2014), Romanian HEIs are allowed to recruit part time PhD candidates, each institution being free to

decide regarding the admission conditions and the schedule students are expected to follow. Although this practice is commonly used in several European countries (Thomson & Walker, 2010), there has been no significant adjustment in the training methods employed on the young Romanian doctoral students. Consequently, Romanian PhD programs are not aligned to international practices and fail to answer to current exigencies regarding the formation of their PhD graduates. This is particularly important given that the academic labor market conditions have evolved tremendously during the past several years (Group of Eight, 2013) and the competitiveness of HEIs' PhD programs is now a major advantage. Hence, the quality of research output became the most important element in jump-starting PhD graduates' academic career.

Given all the aforementioned changes, it is difficult for Romanian HEIs to compete at an international level and to assure top job placement for their PhD graduates. Aside from a perfectible curriculum, the incentives for academics to perform high quality research and to train the PhD students in the same spirit are lacking in Romania. Instead, the faculty and PhD students are encouraged to publish as many papers as possible, with the article and target journal quality being of second order importance.

Nonetheless, the trends and best practices in the international academic market put pressure on the Romanian HEIs to modernize and adapt to a higher set of requirements. For example, one of the major objectives of the Bologna reform is to assure perpetual development of higher education (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). Romanian HEIs, along with all the other members, are expected to comply with these guidelines. Moreover, change can be driven by continuously increased concentration in both funds and research, and collaborative activities in form of training between and within universities will likely intensify (Park, 2007). Universities and business schools need to use all their internal resources by encouraging partnerships among different departments and by strengthening partnerships with peer institutions.

The dynamic environment and the need for Romanian HEIs to face the demands of knowledge-based economy and society (Suciu *et al.*, 2011) makes our research both timely and relevant, as Romanian HEIs can benefit from adjusting their doctoral programs and better train future young academics. We propose an integrated stepwise model for the PhD programs, which offers a thorough theoretical and empirical preparation for doctoral students as it is exposing them to different interdisciplinary quantitative and qualitative research methods. The adjustments are meant to impact the PhD programs from both a curricular and implementation perspective. We stress that the changes in coursework need to be joined by the introduction of additional incentives for both professors and PhD students in order to assure a successful implementation.

Given that Romanian HEIs need to promote interdisciplinary research within their doctoral programs (HG 567/2005), our model comes to promote this undeniably important objective. In addition, we offer insights on how students of French HEIs are guided by their academic advisors both in performing high quality research and in successfully preparing for the international job market. While the former aspect represents the primary objective of our models' successful application, the latter is equally important, as it comes to harvest the outcomes of an enhanced training quality.

The paper is structured as follows: subsequent to the Introduction, we briefly present related academic studies, develop details on theoretical background, discuss the used methodology, present the characteristics of the doctorate program in French HEIs and provide the conclusions and limitations of our study.

## **2. Literature review**

During the last decades the academic environment has went through major transformation (Ambos *et al.*, 2008), which altered the structure and objectives of HEIs. The globalization of academia led to the adoption and implementation of private practices (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012) and the traditional higher education environment gradually evolved into a market-oriented one (Qandile & Oganesyants, 2014). The economic, political and social forces pushed HEIs to develop an international profile that mimics the practices of private companies (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As a result, they systematically expanded their international operations (Altbach & Knight, 2007) by creating a range of activities that include, among others, academic visiting programs, recruitment of international faculty members, enrolment of international students and development of multiple cross-countries centers.

Previous literature has focused on how the new conditions affect the activity of universities and business schools around the world. Most HEIs demonstrate mimetic behavior and incorporate standard mainstream research topics and methodologies in their doctoral programs (Raineri, 2015). This behavior is potentially harmful for the long-term. Yet, it is often emphasized that HEIs need to focus on the long-term strategic utility of PhD programs (Djelic, 2008; Pelger & Grottke, 2015; Raineri, 2015). Specifically, Gioia and Corley (2002), as well as Martins (2005), document that the competition among different HEIs has significantly increased.

Romanian authors have also covered this topic and shared their concerns with regard to the Romanian higher education environment. Ilie *et al.* (2011) emphasizes the concept of universities' benchmarking, while Ilie *et al.* (2012) talks

about the need for Romanian universities to better place themselves in a European context. They stress the need for a comparison among Romanian universities, as well as Romanian and European universities, in order to create a 'quality culture' for Romanian HEIs.

Doctoral education prepares students for a lifetime of intellectual inquiry (Council of Graduate Schools, 1995, p. 1) and assures that PhD candidates attain a higher social understanding and welfare (Raineri, 2015). Yet, in an increasingly competitive global higher education environment, the characteristics and attitudes of PhD candidates are different (Pelger & Grottke, 2015; Thomson and Walker, 2010). Some pursue a business career, where the completion of a doctoral program enriches them intellectually and provides them with a higher social standing. Others aim to become academics and need the doctoral diploma to formally gain access to the academic community (Raineri, 2015). As a result, several European countries (e.g. U.K, France, Germany) have distinguished between two types doctoral programs: research oriented and professional oriented.

While several studies (e.g. Sarbu *et al.*, 2009; Suciu *et al.*, 2011) have integrated the Romanian higher education system in the wider European one, there is little research providing solutions for Romanian HEIs internationalization. To fill this research gap, we highlight that providing high service quality is necessary to satisfy the demand of the global academic labor market. This is particularly important in a context where the European Commission aims to secure the attractiveness and success of all European HEIs (Kehm, 2009). Moreover, as we highlight in this paper, the international supply of PhD graduates does not satisfy the worldwide demand of young academics (Kachelmeier *et al.*, 2005) and Romanian institutions have the opportunity to improve their international brand by better preparing their students for an international academic career.

The first efforts aimed at the internationalization of doctoral programs took place more than two decades ago (Campbell, 1990). French HEIs have identified this need and begun adapting to international requirements (Abdessemed, 2007). However, Romanian HEIs have only recently initiated large-scale investments that are meant to increase the performance and quality of doctoral and postdoctoral studies (POSDRU, 2013). As Sarbu *et al.* (2009) emphasize, due to the scarcity of information on how performance in higher education can be measured, considerable attention has to be given to development, sustainability and constant improvement of quality management systems. There are few studies that directly identify the specificities of international doctoral programs and that can help elaborate concrete requirements to be implemented at Romanian level in order to better align to the international academic standards.

Kehm (2007) focuses on the policy developments regarding doctoral training in Europe and US, while Gilbert (2004) analyzes the doctoral curriculum and calls for

future research to evaluate the specificities of different fields of study. Potolea *et al.*, (2013) takes another approach and makes an international analysis of the existent types of doctorate, identifying different types of PhD training. Moreover, they highlight the need for Romanian universities to make the distinction between the PhDs (research oriented doctoral studies) and professional doctorates (practitioner oriented doctoral studies - DBA). We follow Perry & Cavaya (2004) in making a differentiation between the two – ‘the DBA is a professional doctorate for managers and the PhD is a professional doctorate for academics.’

Our paper makes a strong case for promoting specialized types of doctorates, emphasizing on the development and structuring of Romanian PhDs. Our training model is meant to increase visibility in two distinct ways. First, a research-oriented type of doctorate responds to the current demands on the academic labor market. Specifically, the doctoral graduates of a program implementing our model can target positions of assistant professors in most business school around the world. This is extremely relevant as the business schools’ rhythm of development is faster than the one of universities, they being considered the ‘cash cows’ of the educational system (Starkey *et al.*, 2004).

Although the European Commission aims to direct HEIs in producing, retaining and attracting more of the world’s best faculty members (European Parliament, 2000), this need recently increasing even more as an important part of the European academic population is retiring (Djelic, 2008), Romanian institutions are still far from reaching the European targets. According to Almasan and Reinhardt (2008), no Romanian university is currently in top 500 HEIs and thus they are not yet internationally visible. Multiple authors have emphasized that university rankings and their performance measurements play an important role in creating the higher education reputation and visibility (ter Bogt & Scapens, 2012). Given this, our model will likely help the Romanian HEIs to increase the quality of research and develop the skills and competencies of their PhD students for an international academic market.

We differentiate from all other studies, as we are the first to attempt a direct comparison between French and Romanian HEIs. In our paper, we claim that a way of assuring quality in academia is to increase the degree of internationalization and train PhD students that can be recruited by foreign academic institutions. These practices will respond to social and economic demands for knowledge (Suciu *et al.*, 2011) and have long-term benefits for Romanian HEIs in what regards their international visibility and reputation. We make an important contribution to the existing literature by proposing a training model through which doctoral students can undergo novel research methodologies, target high quality international peer reviewed journals and increase their chances to obtaining good post-graduation job placement in HEIs of their choice.

### 3. Theoretical background

#### 3.1 The Romanian higher education system

The Romanian higher education system was formed in the 1860s, when the first local universities were created. A significant development of the education system took place between the two World Wars. The academic environment was built around two main characteristics: high reputation and quality of education. Up until 1989, the higher education system was characterized by high competition among groups of elite students (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010).

The 1989 change in political system (end of the communist regime) also influenced the structure of the education system. For instance, a number of topics that were previously sidelined (e.g. Business, Sociology) were now allowed to develop. Moreover, due to a surge in the demand for higher education, private universities were established and gained a status similar to the one of state universities. This process is largely common in the field of higher education and is observed in a vast number of countries. For example, Harley *et al.* (2004) underlines that the democratization of education has transformed the higher education system. From providers of knowledge for the elites, universities became mass providers of educational services (Kogan *et al.*, 1994).

In 1995, the new Education Law declares the autonomy of Romanian universities. They remain under the supervision of the Ministry of Education but they are allowed to manage their own funding. According to Mercier (2012) this practice gives a false impression freedom. The policy is aimed at keeping the actions of the universities aligned with the expectations of the government while the accountability of individual universities increases. However, the power remains in the hands of the government. This system pervaded to present date (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). This has consequences in the form of “lack of interdisciplinary studies and rigidly hierarchical power structure” (p. 32).

#### 3.2 The French higher education system

The French higher education constitutes a heterogeneous market characterized by high academic standards. Given its long tradition in providing high quality services, French HEIs are targeted by a large number of international students. This phenomenon naturally leads to increased competitiveness and internationalization on a global education market, where many French institutions (e.g. INSEAD, HEC Paris, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Pierre & Marie Curie University, Descartes University, Paris Sud University) are recognized as main players by different international rankings (e.g. Shanghai Ranking Economics Business, Times Higher Education Ranking, Leiden Ranking, World University



Ranking). As a result, the French HEIs represents a model that francophone HEIs tend to follow.

The French system is a unique model that traces back its roots to the 12th century, when independent institutions were established (NIAD-EU, 2012). Later, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, several transformations occurred, among which the development of *grandes écoles*, higher education institutions that can be found nowhere else around the world, as well as the merge of specialized faculties into universities (Altman & Bournois, 2004). As a result of the incurred changes, the French higher education system currently includes several types of academic institutions: universities, *grandes écoles*, business schools, higher professional schools (*écoles supérieures professionnelles*), specialized schools (*écoles spécialisée*), university institutes for technology (IUT: *instituts universitaires de technologie*), preparatory classes for *grandes écoles* (CPGE: *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*) and research institutes (the most prestigious being CNRS). Given the research question we are addressing in this paper, we will further elaborate only on the first three types of institutions, which have doctoral programs.

*Universities* are public institutions meant to provide high quality education to a wide range of students. According to the French law, universities have to admit all students that show desire to enroll and can provide a proof of completing their *baccalaureat*.

*Grandes écoles* are higher education institutions, private or public, designed with the sole purpose of providing elite scholars (Suleiman, 1979). Consequently, the admission process to this type of institutions is quite selective. Most students enter a two-year preparatory program before taking a national examination. The competition is very high, students being ranked based on the result and only the ones that pass are allowed to take the final selective exams of their HEIs of choice.

*Business schools* have emerged from the *grandes écoles* model. They are private or public institutions meant to create a business elite (Le More, 1982). Since they were not created by the state, they purport to have an international mission and answer to the worldwide economic and social needs. Due to the fact they failed to gain legitimacy in the French higher education (Nouschi, 1988), some business schools fought to obtain the title of *grandes écoles de commerce* (e.g. ESSEC, Skema Business School, NEOMA Business School), managing to create a brand recognized both inside and outside France. As a result, they are extremely active worldwide, being well positioned in top international rankings (e.g. Financial Times ranking) and are considered as some of the best schools in Europe.

We focus on the French setting due to its distinctive characteristics and the historical similarity between the Romanian and the French higher education

system. Moreover, French HEIs are in a stage of development and are pursuing to consolidate their position in the worldwide academic market. Given the transformations that have been undergone, they represent a good example for an educational system in need of development, such as the Romanian one. For decades, European HEIs have been integrated in local contexts and traditions (Pelger & Grottko, 2015) and the French model has always provided a source of development for Romanian institutions.

First, we consider the multitude of French high quality public and private HEIs that constitute a salient environment for performing our analysis. According to NIAD-EU (2012), "*France is one of the major countries in promoting the internationalization of higher education*"(p. 27). Moreover, 3,500 different French HEIs offer higher education studies to over 2 million students (NIAD-EU, 2012). Second, we take into consideration the resemblance between the Romanian and French education systems, which stems from the traditional cooperation between the two countries (Grünberg *et al.*, 2009; Farcas & Tiron Tudor, 2013).

#### **4. Research methodology**

Finding ourselves at the junction of different social sciences, we consider that qualitative research methods are the most appropriate (Baumard & Ibert, 2003) to understand the French doctoral process and develop a model applicable for Romanian HEIs. Additionally, this methodology provides the grounds to analyze the life and work of PhD students and the expectations of HEIs regarding the minimal abilities that students should possess at the end of their doctoral studies.

As research methodology, participative observation is critical to social and management interaction studies (Brewer, 2012). Studying a familiar field, where the researcher has open access to data, facilitates the recording of naturally occurred behavior. Observers participate in the everyday activities they are trying to understand. They take notes, examine and interpret the behavior, perceptions and expectations of their subjects. Although we did not hide our research interest, the length of our observation study, which took place between 2009 and 2014, highly diminished our subjects' chances to hide the nature of their activities and objectives. Moreover, at the time this research took place, we were PhD students and therefore part of our research field. Due to this particularity, we managed to create a comfortable environment for our subjects. They felt free to share information without restraints and provided extremely valuable insights on the structure of different schools and their programs. The relatively lengthy duration of the observation period allows not only to analyze the detailed characteristics of the various doctoral programs, but to also follow the trends in the evolution of the

programs. We rely on this information when constructing our model of doctoral training for Romanian HEIs<sup>1</sup>.

In performing our research, we observed and took part in four public universities and private business schools' doctoral program. Given our research setting and research methodology, we acknowledge the existence of valid reflexivity concerns (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1990). Specifically, by analyzing an environment in which we, the researchers, are deeply emerged might impair our objectivity (Van Maanen, 1979b; Sanday, 1979). Therefore, there is a risk that our conclusions are driven by our perceptions and understanding of the research setting and less by the actual observed phenomena. In order to address any potential reflexivity concerns that can naturally stem from using our methodology we chose to separate the functions of data gathering and data analysis. Moreover, in order to test the objectivity of our conclusions, we shared our concerns, perspectives and findings with other PhD students and several tenured professors pertaining to the French higher education setting and we adjusted our believes accordingly.

We chose to focus on the French higher education system as benchmark for the development of PhD programs within Romanian HEIs because this system has recently went through significant similar changes. Pursuit of increasing their internationally competitive ability, several French business schools have made important transformations and succeeded in reaching a higher international visibility. Thus, we believe this setting represents an excellent example for the Romanian educational system. By analyzing the success and the struggles, of French HEIs, we can better understand how to pass through a similar transitional phase in Romanian institutions. Another reason for which we choose France as object of analyze is that for more than 60 years Romanian HEIs used French models to build and structure their programs (Grünberg *et al.*, 2009; Farcas & Tiron Tudor, 2013). While this is clearly not a sufficient reason for focusing on the French setting<sup>2</sup>, this fact historical proves that the Romanian system can successfully benchmark the French higher education system in implementing modernizing reforms.

## **5. Development of a new PhD model for Romanian HEIs based on exigencies of the French business schools**

### **5.1 The current Romanian PhD structure**

In Romania, doctoral studies are regulated through the government decision HG 567/2005. According to this legislation, the scientific PhD is based on creativity and advanced scientific research which leads to the development of competencies and cognitive abilities. The organization of the doctoral studies pertains to

individual HEIs, accredited by the Ministry of Education, that are free to tailor their PhD programs. In order to be admitted within Romanian PhD program, the students need to have previously graduated an international or national master program in a university recognized in the Bologna system.

The Romanian doctorate consists of two distinct parts (Potolea *et al.*, 2012): (1) advanced courses which cover general topics related to research activities (recently, this intrinsically important aspect of PhD training was left to the discretion of universities and certain doctoral programs ceased to require coursework) and (2) scientific research programs tailored to fit each particular academic concentration. During this stage the PhD candidates are expected to develop and publish original academic research.

In order to successfully complete their doctorate, students are required to draft a thesis that should incorporate the following elements: (1) analysis of a topic of national or international interest; (2) highlight the original character of the research and (3) clearly present the methodology employed. The quality of the doctoral training and that of the research outputs needs to be periodically evaluated by HEIs. Nevertheless, according to Wodak & Fairclough (2010), even if European “policies and regulative initiatives are taken up and adopted for the Romanian context” (p. 32), most of the times their implementation is done pro-forma. Specifically for our setting, the quality analysis of the doctoral program training is performed superficially.

## 5.2 The internationalized French PhD model

In section 2.2 we explain that business schools (*grandes écoles de commerce*) are recognized as the best higher education institutions in business education (Accounting and Management Control, Decision Sciences, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Human Resources, Marketing, Operations Management, Organisational Behaviour, Strategy). Thus, we will refer to these institutions to present a French model and structure of PhD programs.<sup>3</sup>

Business schools doctoral programs span over a 4 year period<sup>4</sup> with a possibility of extension. After a tough process of selection of candidates, the program is usually divided in two phases. The first lasts up to 2 years and consists in intensive interdisciplinary and specialized training. Doctoral students have to participate at research seminars, methodological and theoretical courses, as well as specialized ones. They need to attend and pass a number of courses in order to continue the program. This is considered as a period of accumulation and the students are strongly advised to focus on studying the fundamentals of business management and research provided during this phase.

The courses are tailored to suit the specific needs of the doctoral students according to the requirements of their respective fields.<sup>5</sup> External professors that are experts in their research domain teach most of the courses. This phase has the objective of providing young academics the tools they need to further perform high quality research in peer reviewed journals. During this period, they are asked to develop a viable research question using the knowledge they gain during the courses. However, they are not expected to perform research activities until the end of this phase<sup>6</sup>. Once the students have passed all the mandatory specialization exams and mastered the necessary tools for performing research, they need to take a comprehensive exam that evaluates the knowledge acquired throughout the first phase of their PhD process. If they pass this difficult examination, they are allowed to continue their studies within the doctoral program.

The second phase, also called the ‘candidacy phase’, starts with the period where students are asked to prepare a PhD proposal that is to be defended in front of a committee consisting of both their academic advisors and internal or external professors.<sup>7</sup> As doctoral students have the freedom to choose any topic they want in drafting their proposal, sometimes the faculty within their institution might not be sufficiently knowledgeable on the chosen subject. Therefore, it is extremely important that internationally recognized experts of the topic, external to the institution, participate in evaluating the proposal. Given that hiring business schools expect newly graduated PhDs to be able to publish in top-tier journals, the external referees need to confirm, based on the proposal, that students have the potential to publish in the above mentioned journals.

The youngest PhD candidates are thus pushed to target publications as soon as they complete the first stage of their PhD program. The increasing competition among international institutions and their faculty members determined the emergence of a new form of doctoral dissertation. More and more PhD students prefer to prepare a three-article dissertation instead of a monograph. This new form of dissertation increases the chances of publication in top journals and thus PhD students are encouraged to work with several supervisors that become potential co-authors.

### **5.3 Development of a PhD model for Romanian HEIs**

*“Rigorous research cannot occur without research training, hence the demand for doctoral trained faculty is strongly correlated with the research mission of business schools. Doctoral programs are virtually the only pipeline for business research faculty, and they are the essential ingredient for the continued vitality of business research.” (AACSB, 2003)*

In this section we discuss practical ways to improve the Romanian doctoral programs. We propose a set of solutions for PhDs in business disciplines and we develop a set of courses tailored for Romanian PhD students (Tables 1 to 4). First, we cover the most general ones, that are mandatory and that address all students regardless their field of study (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Methodological and Theoretical Core Courses on Foundation of Business Management (for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD students)**

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Behavioral Sciences	Microeconomics
Econometrics (I)	Qualitative Research Methods (I)
Economic theories of the firm	Quantitative Research Methods (I)
Epistemology	Statistics
Fundamentals of Management	

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Using this set-up, institutions can make large scale economies by decreasing the cost of doctoral training. Due to the fact that business disciplines have overlapping subjects, the core courses are developed based on fundamental requirements for all departments taking part in the doctoral program. Through this commonly shared coursework, the ability to control and evaluate the level of students' research quality is highly enhanced. Moreover, the interdisciplinary communication at the institution level is likely to soar. This is extremely important nowadays as demand for interdisciplinary research is increasing rapidly.

Second, we propose a set of courses that have a less general character, being targeted only by PhD students with research interests covering similar topics and methodologies.<sup>8</sup> The professors assigned to teach the elective courses can either (1) pertain to only one department if their knowledge on the field is widely recognized by their peers or (2) pertain to multiple departments and they can share teaching loads according to their expertise in the field.<sup>9</sup> As resulting from our observations, doctoral students are interested in elective courses organized by no more than three departments, which they chose based on the overlapping topic interest. Based on our data collection, we develop a list of methodological and theoretical elective courses (Table 2).

There are several advantages from implementing this proposal: students can benefit from face to face sessions with experienced specialists pertaining to other departments within or external to their institution. These courses have a more applied character, offering the possibility to explore narrowed research topics or methodologies.

**Table 2. Methodological and Theoretical Elective Courses  
(for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD students)**

Applied Econometrics	Econometrics (II)	Quantitative Research Methods (II)
Asset Pricing	Experimental Methods	Simulation Methods
Bayesian Methods	Finance	Social Networks Analysis
Corporate Business Strategy	Forecasting	Stochastic Processes
Corporate Governance	Game Theory	Strategic Management
Decision theory	Qualitative Research Methods (II)	Survey Methods

Third, we proposed a set of specialization courses to be organized by each department with focus on their own topic. As their main purpose is to engage the PhD students in drafting their first research papers, the content of the courses has to be related to an applied science (e.g. applied econometrics). The specialization courses are mandatory for PhD students pertaining to the department. Exceptionally, enrolment of other PhD students can be permitted.

Students are encouraged to discuss and make connections between specialization courses, the core and elective courses as they can potentially bring insight from other disciplines. Other than knowledge transfer, the courses have two other major advantages: (1) they are designed to introduce students to different senior members in the department with whom they might work in the future, and (2) they prove to be particularly beneficial for faculty members as well, given that they might enrich their own knowledge through the courses' free-exchange character.<sup>10</sup> All in all, the importance of specialization courses is obvious for both students and faculty members.

**Table 3. Specialization Courses (for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD students)**

Actor Network Theory	Critical Theory	Marketing Models
Branding and communication	Financial	Optimal Control Theory
Budget and Performance Evaluation	Econometrics	Organizational Behavior
Consumer Behavior	Governmentality	Organizational Theory
Contingent Theory	Grounded Theory	Practice Theory
Continuous and Discrete-Time Dynamic Games	Innovation and technology strategy	Purchasing & Procurement Management
Corporate Finance	Institutional Theory	Risk Management
Corporate Social Responsibility	Management and Information Systems	Structuration Theory
	Manufacturing Policy	

Last but not least, we propose separate type of classes with focus on the job market preparation. These courses are extremely significant as they may determine if the doctoral graduates are able to obtain a good placement subsequent to their graduation. Due to the current dynamic of the academic job market, all the faculty members need to be involved in preparing the students for the future. According to the expectation of top HEIs, we first divide the job market courses in three main categories, based on their focus (teaching, publishing and career management), followed by a representation of the proposed courses per category (Table 4).

**Table 4. Job Market Courses (for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year PhD students)**

<b>Career Management:</b> Academic Career Management	<b>Publishing:</b> Publishing in Peer Review Journals
<b>Teaching:</b> Pedagogical Module	Research Design Writing Skills

Given that French business schools provide 2-year training programs and France universities require research training during a specialized master program and 1 year of courses during the PhD program, we wish to add to the improvements brought by the Bologna process and propose two solutions that can facilitate the training of top Romanian researchers:

1. Extension of doctoral programs from 3 years up to 4 years. Grünberg *et al.* (2009) states that although Romanian HEIs have adhered to the Bologna process and reduced the period of doctoral studies to 3 years, the actual years spent by students to complete the program is still 4 or 5. Thus, we propose the extension of some doctoral programs as follows: (1) 3 years of studies for professional doctorates; (2) 4 years of studies for PhDs. These doctoral programs will require intensive training during the first two years, based on the model presented above (Tables 1 to 4).
2. Implementation of a research master to graduated previous to starting the PhD. In this case, both professional programs and PhDs will last 3 years, the difference between the two programs consisting in the selection of candidates. To ensure a high research quality, the students selected to enroll the PhDs will be required to validate a research master of 1 year, where they will develop general research skills (following core and elective courses of our model (Tables 1 and 2). Once they successfully enroll in the program, they will continue the training by taking specialization courses in the first year of the program (Table 3).
3. Introducing an incentive system for senior faculty to get more involved in the supervision of the PhDs' research and publication process. The incentives can be represented by a reduction in the number of undergraduate teaching hours for the faculty members that spend time



coordinating the activity of the PhDs. Moreover, the incentives for the senior faculty can take the form of research funding awarded by university for every publication of a PhD student in a peer reviewed journal.

#### **5.4 Discussion on potential long-term benefits for implementing the proposed model in Romanian HEIs**

Given the significant effort required for implementing our model, the Romanian universities need to have a clear view over the potential long-term benefits. As highlighted in the previous sub-section, one of the main advantages of introducing courses with general character consists in immediate increase in control and training quality of PhD students<sup>11</sup>. The integrated classes will bring significant economies of scale, as they pool together PhDs from several disciplines and therefore the individual departments reduce their expenditures. Moreover, exposing PhD students to different research methodologies will likely increase the level of novelty and interdisciplinary projects.

An additional advantage of implementing our proposed model is the possibility of attracting international PhD students that want to benefit from a high quality-training program. The purpose of this type of internationalization program would be to produce doctoral graduates that can be hired by universities or business schools from abroad. As the current PhD programs do not provide eligible candidates to the international academic market, a change in curricula can lead to the improvement of their skills and competencies. After all, the motivation of PhD student to pursue a PhD program is driven by excellent hiring conditions in either the academic or business environment. Yet, the model proposed above represents a first step toward the improvement of Romanian PhD programs. Additional improvements can be made and we encourage other researchers to evaluate the state of the Romanian higher education and bring adjustments to our model.

A high level of remuneration matches the effort that is invested in performing high quality research required by top tier institution around the world. After graduating from a modern doctoral program, a young assistant professor is paid on average between 90 and \$135.000 (AACSB, 2013)<sup>12</sup>. The level of salary varies by institution and discipline (Figure 1). The highest salaries are usually encountered in research-oriented institutions that have the highest expectations from young PhD graduates. Even if Romanian HEIs cannot currently offer this level of payment due to the legal limitations of university faculty salaries, the level of salaries at international level need to be highlighted. Romanian PhD candidates should be able to compete on the job market and they have to be knowledgeable of their possible benefits.

Table 5. Assistant Professor Salaries by Field/Discipline (\$'s in 000's)

Field/discipline	Mean 2012	Percentage Change From 2011	Mean New Hires
Accounting/Taxation	131.6	3.1	134.9
CIS/MIS	103.4	2.0	109.6
Economics/Managerial Economics	94.0	3.5	91.0
Finance/Banking/Real Estate/Insurance Management/Behavioral	139.9	3.4	141.5
Science/International Business/Strategic Management	109.7	1.9	111.1
Marketing	114.7	3.0	113.7
Production/Operations Management	121.1	3.6	121.3
Quantitative Methods/Operations Research/Statistics	105.2	4.7	108.0
Combined (All fields/disciplines, including fields/disciplines not listed above)	97.9	-13.1	102.7

(Source: AACSB, 2013, p. IX)

Moreover, the increase of international competitiveness in academia represents a major incentive for the Romanian government and HEIs to modernize. Specifically, they need to update the practices employed within the PhD programs in order to increase the international visibility of Romanian universities. Wodak and Fairclough (2010) emphasize two major potential pitfalls for Romanian HEIs. First, future PhD candidates may find foreign programs are more appealing than the Romanian ones. Therefore, they might choose going abroad for their studies and will do so increasingly often if the international educational programs are more attractive. Second, they argue that the prestigious Romanian universities that have built their reputation during the communism era have lost ground in the detriment of foreign universities. Thus, in the international market of higher education their image seems to continue deteriorating.

*“The University of Bucharest cannot avoid this process of competition, constantly invoking its prestigious past and considering this a sufficient argument to attract students. Certain faculties of the University of Bucharest which have used this way of thinking have experienced for several years the negative consequences of a fall in applications and have had to correct their attitude.” (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010: 34, citing the University of Bucharest’s Manual of quality control)*

The PhD programs that intend to offer their students an excellent placing as assistant professors need to assure that the quality of their research activities corresponds to international standards. To that purpose, is vital to implement a

PhD training program similar to the one proposed in this paper. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge a number of limitations of our proposed model.

First, the Romanian legislation can represent a deterrent for the application of our model. The Law of Education prohibits the assessment of PhD students' abilities through examination. Thus, in order for such a model to be successful, the Romanian government should support and encourage the development of PhD programs that are based on outstanding international concepts.

Second, the culture of hiring assistant professors in Romania is completely different relative to other countries. Romanian PhD graduates are rarely hired outside of their university. Specifically, the norm is to hire PhDs at the university where they graduated. Given this, the competition in the academic job market is almost non-existent. Moreover, the attention of the PhD candidates is directed towards winning the favors of senior faculty members (Wodack & Fairclough, 2010). The research and teaching skills of the PhD students and junior faculty members are often of second order importance relative to the power of their personal network. It's the latter that is likely to win them the favors of the senior faculty and concurrently the promotion in the department.

## **6. Conclusions**

*“Within Europe, the Bologna process is leading to a convergence of Ph.D. programs across different countries and institutions” (Group of eight, 2013)*

Considering the importance and dynamic character of the academic market, European HEIs were called to take steps toward the implementation of different strategies expected to increase their international visibility, the quality of their research output and the effectiveness of their pedagogical activities. In our quest to identify the reasons for which Romanian HEIs are not yet internationally competitive, we focused on several characteristics of PhD programs that, if adjusted, can bring quick and positive results.

To our knowledge, no other paper is aiming to improve the structure of Romanian PhD programs through a long-term observational study and, as we emphasize in this paper, we consider of paramount importance to promote the development of different strategies of HEIs internationalization. Specifically, the constant improvement and maintenance of high quality doctoral programs is critical for the long-term research output of any HEIs. The implementation of new curricula, followed by future development of teaching methods and research techniques will

not only assure the short-term improvement of Romanian PhD programs, but will also lead to a change in the mentality of Romanian academics.

To reach our objective we rely on an extremely salient proprietary data set and perform a comparison between Romanian HEIs and several top French business schools. We contribute to the literature by providing Romanian universities with a tangible model of PhD program structure that can help to enhance the quality of research and pedagogical skills of future academics and the competitiveness of their PhD graduates on the international job market. Moreover, we offer additional guidance on how HEIs can reduce their costs through the implementation of various courses with a more general character and make important economies of scale that can be achieved with positive economic benefits for the higher education institution.

Most importantly, following the implementation of our proposed model the level of high quality interdisciplinary projects would likely increase, the internationalized PhD program would attract foreign doctoral students and could ultimately produce PhD graduates that would pursue an international academic career. To this purpose, we advocate the introduction of a clear separation between the professional and scientific doctorates. Our model is best suited for enhancing the quality of the research-oriented type of doctoral programs and therefore it implies that the regulatory framework in Romanian HEIs needs to be adjusted. We advance and discuss two possible reforms regarding the structure of the curriculum that presume university-specific discretion in implementation. Consequently, our paper makes a clear policy contribution regarding the modernization of Romanian HEIs' PhD programs.

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- <sup>1</sup> We develop more on this in the following section.
- <sup>2</sup> We are aware that there are also significant similarities between the Romanian and the German or the Soviet models of HEIs.
- <sup>3</sup> HEC is the only institution with its own PhD program. All the other French business schools have joint PhD programs with at least one French university.
- <sup>4</sup> During our observations, we noticed that the average duration of the PhD program is 5 years for business schools and 4 years for state universities.
- <sup>5</sup> The students need to attend both mandatory and elective courses. While the former expose the students to the general tools for performing quantitative and qualitative research, the latter offers the opportunity for specialisation in the method/field that the doctoral student is interested for later implementing in his/her research.
- <sup>6</sup> During this period they are less than often required to teach or to be teaching assistants.
- <sup>7</sup> The proposal consists in a document detailing what the students intends to develop in their thesis. Usually, this is a preliminary draft of the final PhD thesis, consisting of around 20 pages. The students develop the draft based on theory they have learned during the courses, preparing a thorough literature review and describe their data availability.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, courses that have high commonalities in research topics and methodology: (1) Finance, Accounting and Economics *or* (2) Management, Organizational Behaviour and Entrepreneurship. A student interested in Accounting research might benefit from Finance elective courses. Similarly, a PhD that is interested in Organizational Behaviour topics might gain from attending Entrepreneurship elective classes.
- <sup>9</sup> A professor in the Finance department could teach a Statistics course if he/she has extensive experience in this topic and if his/her publications include novel statistical methodologies.
- <sup>10</sup> Sometimes, during the exchange with different professors, PhD students can come up with innovative ideas on research methods, design or interdisciplinary transfer of concepts.
- <sup>11</sup> The teaching faculty members might also be contracted from external institutions.
- <sup>12</sup> This study refers to US universities.