

Business PhD

...soon a
must-have

Prof Hein Oosthuizen, retiring head of USB's doctoral programme, told JANA MARAIS why this qualification is suddenly so popular.

With the MBA degree becoming more commonplace, the corporate sector is increasingly looking for people with a business PhD. "The nature of the PhD has changed drastically. Whereas, in the past, it was purely an academic qualification, it now consists of a combination of academic and business content. The focus is on developing employable knowledge," says Prof Hein Oosthuizen, who holds firm views on what universities should do about it.

"Twenty years ago, only people who wanted to pursue a career in academics would do a PhD. If you had a PhD and worked in business, this degree didn't help you at all. In fact, it counted against you, because your knowledge and skills were seen as too academic.

"Today, people with business PhDs are more and more in demand internationally, because they have rare, specialised skills. The business PhD is already beginning to challenge the traditional MBA in the market place, especially in Europe," says Oosthuizen.

The new-look business PhD has also changed the profile of the typical student, and universities should adapt their product to suit students' needs, he says.

"Typical PhD students are working people, they're quite a bit older than they used to be and they are impatient. They want to see results quickly. Many of our students are consultants for example, and they don't want to wait four, five, six years before they get career recognition for their academic work," Oosthuizen points out.

More than 80% of the USB's 37 PhD students work full-time, mainly in the private sector.

"There must be ways to give students

recognition for the completion of parts of their PhDs. If you can break down the degree in segments and award credits for it, this will enable students to partake in exchange programmes with other universities."

The growing popularity of business PhDs in South Africa is forcing the private sector and universities to work together more, with Eskom as the first company to create a PhD-partnership with a business school.

In 2006, 10 senior Eskom managers enrolled

as PhD candidates with the USB. "Five of them have already received big promotions at work, which are directly attributed to their PhD studies," says Oosthuizen. "The positive spin-offs for students and businesses are real and tangible."

Oosthuizen predicts more companies will follow in Eskom's footsteps.

"Internationally, universities and the private sector are forging closer relationships, especially because there isn't much funding available from governments for doctoral studies, while the private sector has a big need for graduates."

Oosthuizen, who started lecturing at the USB in 1985 after seven years in the private sector, will still be involved with some of the academic programmes and oversee 12 master's students this year. "I have no intention of going to sit on a beach somewhere or of starting any hobbies," he says.

Oosthuizen played a pivotal role in developing the structure of the USB's PhD programme and in the USB's membership of the European Doctoral Programmes Association in Management and Business Administration (EDAMBA).

The USB is the first business school outside Europe to obtain EDAMBA membership. Other members include the London Business School, Helsinki School of Economics and Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. □

For more information on the USB's PhD or to enrol, contact Marie Willows on 021 918 4243 or usbcom@usb.ac.za.

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