Supporting non-traditional postgraduate research students

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February 2013
Slant Board (1961), created by American choreographer Simone Forti

Support for non-traditional postgraduate students can be a particularly complex and multi-dimensional task. But you can be in control if you have a technique.
the technique: a formula for support!

Very important! Need to master it to solve quadratic equations when you have \( ax^2 + bx + c = 0 \)

the solutions are \( x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a} \)

plug in values into formula

\[ x = \frac{-(-9) \pm \sqrt{(-9)^2 - 4(1)(8)}}{2(1)} \]

\[ x = \frac{9 \pm \sqrt{81 - 32}}{2} \]

\[ x = \frac{9 \pm 9}{2} \]

solutions → \( x = 8 \), \( x = 1 \)

Example: Solve \( x^2 - 9x + 8 = 0 \)

First write in standard form

\( x^2 - 9x + 8 = 0 \)

\( a = 1 \), \( b = -9 \), \( c = 8 \)

\[ x = \frac{-(-9) \pm \sqrt{(-9)^2 - 4(1)(8)}}{2(1)} \]

\[ x = \frac{9 \pm \sqrt{81 - 32}}{2} \]

\[ x = \frac{9 \pm 9}{2} \]

solutions → \( x = 8 \), \( x = 1 \)
characteristics of the formula

- the provision should be designed in a ‘creative’ manner – however creativity produces better results if it springs from a solid basis, developed through a systematic approach of some sort

- the provision should be ‘dynamic’ – this means that there should be always room for adjustment and improvement, based on information generated through a fully embedded procedure of regular assessment of the situation
a ‘creative’
but also systematic approach

Consider all aspects of the equation.
Then try to design a provision which shows that all aspects have been considered – both individually and in relation to each other.
a ‘dynamic’ approach that can accommodate change
what is a ‘dynamic’ approach?

Make sure that you regularly consider the student data:

• how many students are studying?
• in which areas of research?
• how many are part-time?
• how many are international?
• how many work on interdisciplinary projects?
• how many work on practice-led/based projects?
• how many work on funded projects?
• how many are funded?
... and so on and so forth

(the categories used to organise this data should be equally adjustable)

the overall picture changes as a result of internal re-arrangements (similarly to how the re-arrangement of the dots in the previous picture could alter the overall visual message of this image)

the careful consideration of the student date should determine a process of resetting priorities and undertaking relevant adjustments
the equation...
how to consider all aspects of the equation

The following four questions refer to well known topics – however they should be asked again, specifically for the purposes of this exercise:

- What is a postgraduate research degree?
- What is a ‘non-traditional’ postgraduate research degree?
- What is a ‘non-traditional’ postgraduate research student?
- What means support for a postgraduate research degree or ‘non-traditional’ postgraduate research degree – what kinds of things are involved in a research degree for which students might need support? (such as phases of study, supervision, fieldwork, research environment etc.)
interactive section

• attendees are asked to create lists of points in response to the above four questions

• the main reason behind this part of the exercise is to make visible any wrong assumptions about what is a ‘non-traditional’ postgraduate research degree. Unorthodox examples are offered by the session presenter at this point to encourage attendees question their assumptions

• once the lists are ready, attendees might be able to see that both ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ degrees are both very varied and both ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ students have significantly varied needs.

• the final conclusive points (as introduced in the next slide) highlight the consequences of the above realisations
Conclusions

• There can be various non-traditional postgraduate research degrees, and the number of such degrees is likely to change in the future, to the point that the ‘traditional’ degree could change from being the rule to being the exception.

• There can be an infinite number of types of ‘non-traditional’ students, and this could even mean that there is no such thing as a ‘traditional’ postgraduate research student !!

• This leaves us with: a) the realisation that the ‘norm’ is increasingly characterised by unprecedented variation, and b) the need to take into account such variation.

• Therefore considering the needs of ‘non-traditional’ students could be the first step towards reconsidering the logic behind our entire support provision for postgraduate research students, as a provision addressing an impressive variation of needs, which also seem to be in constant flux

• (please observe the image on the next slide!!)
Loie Fuller Dancing, Metropolitan Museum of Art
photography by Samuel Joshua Beckett, ca 1990

More information available at:
http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/190036440
Images and video documentation available at:
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