

The College of The Bahamas' Graduate Programmes and Collaborative Partnerships: 2003 to Present

Keithley Woolward
Office of Graduate Programmes¹

ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief overview of the College of The Bahamas' graduate degree offerings since the establishment of the Office of Graduate Programmes in 2003. It maps the various articulation agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, and collaborations that the College has entered into with universities in North America, Great Britain and elsewhere, to facilitate a range of graduate degree programmes in diverse disciplines, such as Health Care Administration, Reading, Library and Information Science, Early Childhood and Elementary Teaching, School Counselling, and Business Administration, among others. The Office of Graduate Studies acknowledges the important connection between graduate studies and the College's research agenda and seeks to bring coherence to programme development and the research initiatives of the institution.

INTRODUCTION

The Graduate Programmes Office at The College of The Bahamas was officially established in March 2003 to centralize the administration of the growing number of graduate programmes at the master's degree level at the College. To date, the College of The Bahamas has offered several master's degree programmes in collaboration with institutions abroad. Two hundred and seventeen persons have graduated from 12 cohorts since the year 2000, involving eight different master's programmes and six institutions.

Meeting National Educational and Private Sector Needs

The graduate programmes delivered to date in collaboration with other institutions have been

chosen primarily to meet national educational needs as specified by the Ministry of Education and other sectors of society in order to build national capacity. For example, we feel that the addition of 72 school counsellors and guidance counsellors trained at the master's level to the school system is a significant contribution to meeting a national need. Before 2001, there were approximately 35 trained school counsellors in the primary and secondary schools in the country.

In addition, to the foregoing, several graduates in the first and second cohorts of the master's in Educational Administration Degree Programme are now principals of high schools in New Providence, Abaco, and San Salvador. In addition, one person from the first cohort of that programme is now a district

¹ Keithley Woolward, Office of Graduate Programmes, The College of The Bahamas, P.O. Box N-4912, Nassau, Bahamas.

e-mail: Keithley.woolward@cob.edu.bs

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superintendent in New Providence. Further, several graduates of the master's programme in Special Education are now intervention specialists for the Ministry of Education.

The collaborative master's programmes have been delivered according to a deliberate and purposeful plan to increase capacity at the graduate-level at the College by increasing the number of COB faculty who teach in programmes with each successive cohort of the same programme. From the first cohort of the master's in School Counselling programme to the third cohort of the programme, there was an increase in the percentage of courses taught by COB faculty and local expertise from 23% to 50%. The incorporation of a strong research component was also deliberately included in the most recent collaborative programmes. The Master of Science in Early Childhood and Elementary Teaching programme, for example, included a two-semester research study conducted by students in their own classrooms or schools. The Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning with Technology programme was our first thesis master's programme.

Delivery of Master's Degree Programmes

The master's degree programmes delivered at the College of The Bahamas in collaboration with other institutions to date involve the completion of 30-41 credits, typically over an 18-24 month period. Classes are delivered on the Oakes Field Campus on weekends. One semester of classes (usually in the summer) is delivered on the campus of the contracted institution abroad. Classes are delivered by face-to-face instruction, online coursework, and/or a combination of these two modalities. The master's degree programmes are usually offered to cohorts of 20 to 30 students. Instructors in each programme are faculty of the College of The Bahamas and the contracted institution abroad.

The Office of Graduate Programmes has been

instrumental in the development of The College's long history of inter-institutional partnerships. Past collaborative programmes include:

- Master of Health Care Administration (M.H.A.) in collaboration with Western Connecticut State University, Danbury, Connecticut.
- Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Emotional Handicaps and Learning Disabilities in collaboration with the University of Miami, Miami, Florida.
- Master of Education (M.Ed.) in School Counselling and Classroom Guidance in collaboration with Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- Master of Arts (M.A.) in Teaching and Learning with Technology in collaboration with Ashford University, Clinton, Ohio.
- Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Educational Administration in collaboration with Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- Master of Arts (MA) in Library and Information Science in collaboration with University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.
- Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Special Education - Mild to Moderate Intervention in collaboration with Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.
- Master of Science (M.S.) in Early Childhood and Elementary Teaching in collaboration with Wheelock College, Boston, Massachusetts.

A particular point of pride was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the College and the University of London for the joint delivery of a Master of Laws (LL.M) in Maritime Law in September 2013.

Programmes and Memoranda of Understanding in the negotiation phase (since Fall 2012) include:

- California State University at Northridge, a distance education/online learning partnership for institutional/capacity building.
- Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Master of Education in Reading in partnership with COB's current programme.
- University of Georgia, Athens, programme partnerships in Special Education, Counseling and Leadership.

The Graduate Programmes Review Board

The Graduate Programmes Review Board was established upon recommendation of the advisory committee and was approved by the College Council in 2009. The faculty-driven Graduate Programmes Review Board convened in December 2009 with the following mandate:

- Sanction and approve the development of graduate programmes
- Establish the conditions for the delivery of graduate programmes
- Develop and implement quality assurance mechanisms for graduate programmes
- Recommend faculty to teach in graduate programmes to the College Council
- Recommend the conferral of graduate degrees

The strategic mission of Graduate Programmes is to: produce professionals and researchers to support and drive national development; engage and drive public policy; increase the body of knowledge on The Bahamas as an object of scholarly research; utilize existing infrastructure and resources to promote the enactment of the strategic plan of the College of The Bahamas.

With the establishment of the Graduate Programmes Review Board the College of The Bahamas is now able to deliver graduate

programmes independent of other institutions. The first cohorts of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and the Master of Science in Reading with Inclusive Education programmes were launched in 2010 and 2011 respectively. A Master of Education and a Master of Public Administration are currently in the development phase.

The MBA programme was the first graduate degree programme developed, approved and implemented under the supervision of the Graduate Programmes Review Board. The goal was to match the learning outcomes of the MBA with the uniqueness of the Bahamian economy and the need to stay competitive in a globalised market place. The programme was designed following extensive research and dialogue with several major organisations in The Bahamas, incorporating a broad range of professional disciplines and economic sectors. Executives affirmed strong organisational demand for graduates with backgrounds in entrepreneurship and innovation, leadership and financial decision-making. Industry input was essential to designing a degree that was closely tied to the needs of the country, and ensuring that The Bahamas benefits from the expertise of its most talented people.

Conclusion

As the College of The Bahamas moves towards university status, the Office of Graduate Programmes is actively involved in shaping the future of graduate studies and research within the university. The Office of Graduate Programmes has convened a Faculty Working Group with regard to the University of Bahamas' Research Agenda and Graduate Studies Academic Vision. The group will produce a Working Paper to facilitate and assist in bringing coherence to the research initiatives and graduate programme development activities of the University transition process.