

Hiring at Top-Ranked Programs in Higher Education: A Graphical View using Network Analysis



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Abstract

Using social network analysis, this study explores the relationships and connections among top programs and faculty in higher education administration. The literature suggests that elite colleges and universities tend to preserve and improve their reputations by hiring from each other (Burns, 2004; Kennedy, 1997). In addition to displaying the social network graph formed by 179 faculty teaching at 23 programs, descriptive statistics, such as "hiring past graduates," "hiring within the conference," are reported. Results show that, while a few institutions play prominent roles, the social network among higher education programs is actually quite diversified and "healthy."

Introduction

How do faculty members in top higher education programs move through their career? Are myths about "hiring from within," or "cannibalizing from each other," true? Are faculty from outside the circle finding their way into positions at top programs? The answers lie within the social fabric that connects people to people and people to institutions. Social network analysis software allows for the quantitative analysis and graphical representation of social networks.

Magner (1993) wrote of "a tradition among elite institutions of hiring people largely from other elite campuses" (p. 1). In his book "Homo Academicus," French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1988) suggested that ruling and intellectual classes, including university faculty, strive to reproduce themselves. Bair and Bair (1998) reported that 60% of faculty members at top-ten graduate programs in special education were graduates from one of the same top schools.

Method

The sample is the top 23 higher education programs according to the latest U.S. News rankings (2005). Faculty at each of the programs were identified using university Web sites. Vitas were used to collect the data. The methodology is straightforward and uses only three variables: Current institution, previous institution (if applicable), and institution where doctorate was earned. The analysis produces a collection of data points and connecting lines that makes for an interesting graphical representation, a theoretical construct, for discussing the sociology of hiring among top programs.

Sample

Table 1. Sample of top higher education administration programs. Taken from U.S. News & World Report rankings of America's Best Graduate Schools (US News, 2005).

Rank	Institution	Faculty (n)
1	University of Michigan	12
2	University of California, Los Angeles	10
3	Pennsylvania State University	12
4	Stanford University	9
5	Michigan State University	11
6	Harvard University	16
6	Indiana University	9
8	University of Southern California	11
9	University of Maryland	3
10	Vanderbilt University	4
11	Columbia University Teachers College	6
12	University of Wisconsin	5
13	The Ohio State University	9
14	University of Georgia	10
15	University of Iowa	6
16	University of Arizona	5
16	University of Pennsylvania	6
18	Iowa State University	9
18	University of Virginia	5
20	University of Texas at Austin	7
21	New York University	5
22	University of California, Berkeley	3
23	Florida State University	7
Total:		179

Findings

Interpretation of network graphs is subjective. However, results show that, while a few institutions play prominent roles, the social network among higher education programs is actually quite diversified and "healthy." Relationships, reputation, and serendipity play key roles. Some of the "busiest" nodes were: Harvard (25), Michigan (18), Penn State (18), Michigan doctorate (16), Michigan State (15), USC (13), Penn (10), and Indiana doctorate (10). Also noteworthy: Other school doctorate (53), Other school previous position (51), and Previous administrative position (31).

Hiring from "within?"

- Holds doctorate from same institution = 20.1% (n = 36)
- Holds doctorate from same athletic conference = 41.3% (n = 74)
- Holds doctorate from Top 25 school = 70.9% (n = 127)

References

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Where did faculty member come from?

- Faculty position at Top 25 school = 20.7% (n = 37)
- Faculty position at other school = 28.5% (n = 51)
- Administration position = 17.3% (n = 31)
- Direct from graduate school = 33.5% (n = 60)

