



## **Ph.D. program information (for the concentration in management [organizational behavior and human resource management])**

### **FAQs from potential Ph.D. applicants**

Many who are considering pursuing a Ph.D. in management have questions... questions about the process, or about a particular program, or about the professions that lie beyond. If you have such general questions about the Ph.D. program at the VCU School of Business, go [here](#). Dr. Jose Cortina addresses some typical questions about our Ph.D. program in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship below. Think of this not as a general policy statement, but more like what you'd get if you had a conversation with Jose in his office.

### **Should I pursue a Ph.D. in Management?**

The short answer is, if you want to become a professor in a business school, then maybe. If not, then no. If you might want to become a professor in a business school, then you have to ask yourself if you want to dedicate 4-5 years to a Ph.D. program.

What you will do as a Ph.D. student is:

- (a) Take 2-3 classes per semester for 2-3 years.
- (b) Teach management classes to undergraduates, probably starting in your second year.
- (c) But more than anything else, you will do research. Some of it will be your dissertation, but if you are in a good program, your dissertation will only be one of many research projects. *If you don't want to do research, you may as well stop reading this.*

### **What kind of research will I work on?**

Still here? Good.

It depends on the faculty member with whom you are working. Most programs will assign you to one or two faculty members at the outset of the program. The good programs (e.g., VCU) will assign you to someone with whom you share some interests. At VCU, for example, if you express interest in leadership research, you will probably be assigned to [Andra Serban](#) or [Chris Reina](#). If you have an interest in emotions in the workplace, you will probably be assigned to [Doug Pugh](#). If you are interested in research methods and/or meta-science (studying how the field studies the workplace), then you will work with [Sven Kepes](#), [Frank Bosco](#), or [Jose Cortina](#) (i.e., me).

The really good programs will also start helping you to develop your own ideas for research. For example, [Zitong Sheng](#), one of our current Ph.D. students, started working with me on a project about methods for combining meta-analysis and structural equations modeling (advanced research methods stuff go [here](#) if you want to learn more). But then she started developing her own interests in “voice” behaviors in the workplace, which is the management term for speaking up at work. She also started investigating the time lags that researchers use in longitudinal designs (e.g., If I want to know whether job satisfaction predicts whether people quit or not, should I measure the quit variable 1 month after measuring the satisfaction variable? 2 months?

A year?). We are still working on various projects together, and hopefully we always will, but the emphasis shifts from me leading the projects to her leading them.

### **What is life like as a business school professor?**

I'm a professor, so I have to give the professorial answer, which is that it depends. Some business schools are more teaching-oriented while others are more research-oriented. All professors are expected to do both, but the ratio depends on the school. I have friends in teaching-oriented places, and they spend almost all of their time preparing for class, teaching classes, developing classes, and advising students. At a research-oriented school like VCU, you do teach classes of course, but a lot of your teaching is one-on-one or one-on-a few mentoring of graduate students. That mostly consists of working on research with graduate students, teaching them how to conduct studies, how to write, how to navigate the journal review process, and the like. The rest of your time is devoted to one of two things. You are either working on various research projects or you are engaging in some sort of professional service. The research projects are usually collaborative efforts. For example, I have several projects on which I am collaborating with my VCU colleagues, but I also have collaborators in Australia, England, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and even Michigan! (although Michigan doesn't really count because that's just my sister Lilia, also a professor).

The other thing on which you work is professional service. We review papers that have been submitted to journals in order to decide if the papers should be published or not. We review submissions to conferences to see if they should be accepted for the conference. We attend conferences like the Academy of Management conference (<http://aom.org/annualmeeting/>) and the one of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (<http://www.siop.org/>). We might be members of committees for these and other professional organizations.

But mostly, if you aren't in the classroom or preparing to be, you are working on research. This is a link to a good video about life as a b-school professor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX14sMICvFk>

For someone who wants to understand the world of work, collaborate with people all over the world, and work with students, there is no better job.

### **What kind of research would I work on?**

Whatever interests you. It really is as simple as that. I'm interested in philosophy of science, statistical methods, and related topics, so that's a lot of what I do. But other topics capture my attention from time to time, so I have also published on personality as a predictor of job performance, psychological contracts in the workplace, leadership, even sleepiness in the workplace! You name it.

And because so many different things happen in the workplace, you can match nearly any interest that you might have. The sleepiness example that I just mentioned started because my student Heather Mullins used to work in a sleep lab and was interested in the workplace consequences of sleepiness (spoiler alert: sleepiness is bad for productivity). My student [Kate Keeler](#) moonlights as a jazz singer and has a lot of musical training. So, she is studying music in the workplace. She has found, for example, that music in a minor key improves performance on

vigilance tasks (e.g., air traffic control) while music in a major key improves idea generation (go to [workingtothebeat.com](http://workingtothebeat.com) to learn more, listen to examples, etc.).

The point is that you work on whatever interests you. Nobody cares what you work on as long as you do it well enough to get your work published in good journals. And if you are wondering how you do that, well, that's why you get a Ph.D.!

### **What's the market like?**

There are always jobs, because there are so many business schools. Most Ph.D. programs have a 100% placement rate straight out of graduate school. Starting salaries for new Ph.D.s vary depending on the school. Even the lowest salaries for tenure-track jobs are almost six figures. The highest salaries for new Ph.D.s go up every year. For those on the market to start in Fall of 2019, total salaries for the best-paying jobs will be over \$175,000 plus guaranteed money in the summer (often 1/9 or 2/9 of base salary). Not a bad salary for doing whatever interests you.

### **What should I look for in a Ph.D. program?**

A lot of people will tell you to go to a school that has faculty with similar interests to yours. They are wrong.

I'm not saying that you should avoid such places. I'm just saying that there are more important things. Some places emphasize development of Ph.D. students. Others have that as a lower priority. The easiest way to tell the difference is by looking at the CVs of the faculty, which you can usually find on department web pages ([here](#) is our website; [here](#) is our faculty). One of the first things listed on faculty CVs is publications. If the faculty publish a lot with students, and especially if students are first author on lots of publications, then that school must have a pretty good mentoring model. If not, then they don't. If the students aren't getting publications, then they won't get the better jobs.

It is also important to visit the schools that you are considering. If you are a finalist for a position in a program, then they will probably invite you for a visit. Do it, even if you have to pay your own way. When you get there, ask the faculty about their approaches to mentoring. But more importantly, ask the current Ph.D. students. They'll give you the real scoop.

DO NOT go to a place that doesn't prioritize development of Ph.D. students.

### **How do I get in?**

Most programs look for the same things. The relative importance of each might vary, as does the height of the bar, but generally we look for...

- (a) A good GPA (somewhere in the A range probably).
- (b) GRE or GMAT scores in the 70+ percentile.
- (c) Research experience, preferably with some outcomes like presentations at national conferences.
- (d) Very strong letters of reference (personally, I don't pay much attention to letters, but most people do).

### **With which faculty should I look to work?**

It's tempting to gravitate towards the people who share your interests. This may work out fine, but there are two problems with this approach. First, you learn a lot in your first year of graduate

school, and your interests are likely to change. Second, it is FAR more important to work with a good mentor.

My candid advice is, get interested in the things that interest the best mentors. You will develop more quickly, and you will be a happier person. Also, there is a good chance that you can get them interested in whatever interests you. Then everybody wins.