AUSTRALIAN GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVE OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

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Abstract: *Professional socialization can be described as the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge pertaining to a professional subculture. The literature suggests that study and consideration of professional socialization assists in improving tertiary education and graduates' preparedness for the real world pressures of professional working life. This paper presents Australian valuation graduates' perspective of their socialization into the valuation profession. It identifies the values and skills they deemed important as a novice professional value and when they believed they had achieved the status of a professional valuer. It provides insights from the novice professional valuer, for the provision of mentoring and supervision and what may be implemented by the profession to deal with some perceived shortcomings.*

1   Introduction

Professional socialization refers to the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge pertaining to a professional subculture.

This paper discusses part of the work undertaken by Page (2007b), and follows the previous review undertaken by Page (2004) and research relating to socialisation with respect to property professional bodies (Page 2005). The paper provides a brief introduction to socialization and what the literature offers with respect to ensuring successful socialization of graduates. The main part of the paper reports on interviews with valuation graduates who have completed their time as graduate valuers and have recently achieved Certified Practicing Valuer (CPV) status.

1.1   Socialization model

The socialization model that was used as the basis of the review by Page (2004) is shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Conceptualizing graduate and professional student socialization (Weidman, J.C., Twale, D.J. & Stein, E.L. 2001 p37)
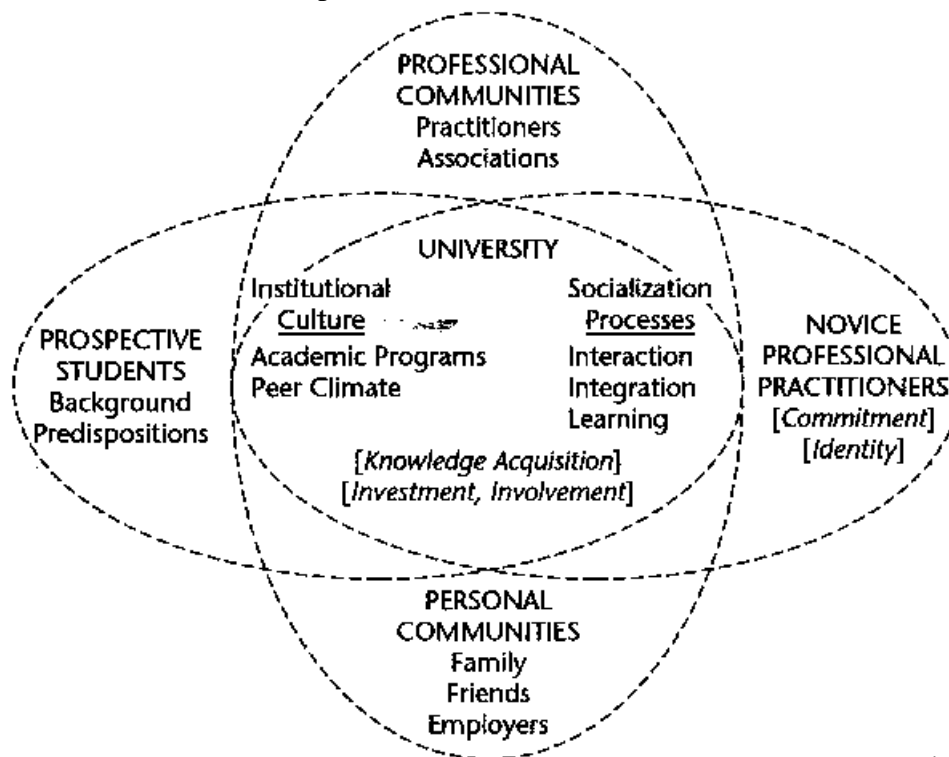

Figure 1 provides a framework for understanding the socialization of graduate and professional students. At the centre is the core socialization experience in the professional degree program consisting of the institutional culture of the university, the socialization processes and the core elements of socialization. This is the part of the socialization process over which that university's have key control.

Surrounding the central portion of Fig. 1 are four other components of professional student socialization: prospective students (background, predisposition), professional communities (practitioners, associations), personal communities (family, friends, employers) and novice professional practitioners. These components are outside universities control, though prospective student's backgrounds may be taken into account in the selection process.

The ultimate outcome from this model is the professional who has been transformed with respect to self-image, attitudes and thinking processes.

Page (2004) focussed on the professional socialization component related to the professional bodies and the university component. Page (2005) further explored aspects relating to the professional bodies requirements for membership.

Page (2004) reported on the socialization process and the transformation that occurred:

> Graduates have not only obtained technical skills through university studies but have also changed their values and how they think. Their socialization means that they think like, look like and have values of their respective professions.

1.2 Socialization Literature

From the literature on professional socialization reported extensively in Page (2007c) a number of elements emerge that the university and or the profession can have some influence over and as such influence the professional socialization of the graduate and the novice professional.

- **Early content/big picture/professional end point**
  It is important to provide early understanding of the professional end point and also an understanding of why students are learning particular content. If they understand why, there is a greater chance of in-depth learning.

- **Role Models and mentoring**
  Role models can have both a positive and negative influence, both at the university and in working as a novice professional. Positive role models are advocated in all aspects of student interaction, including program administration. Students read the staff behaviour and not what the staffs actually says

- **Placement**
  Field/clinical placements provide significant socialization, but it is essential that positive role models are provided and people have clear expectations. It is important to provide mentors the desired organisational practice.

- **Reflection**
  Authors promote the value of reflection in the socialization process. Keeping diaries or using professional development plans aid this reflection. It is critical not to overload the curriculum so that there is time for reflection.

- **Ceremonies**
  Pharmacy and Medical programs have included white coat ceremonies early in programs. This reinforces to students that they are becoming professionals.

- **Curriculum**
  The curriculum should contain content and values that are expected of professionals. Significant efforts have been made to change the professions by changing the curriculum. However but this can be lost if graduates enter the workplace without induction or clear expectations.

- **Long-term impact**
  Tertiary studies that incorporate effective early socialization generate benefits later in a graduates' the career as well as first up.

1.3 Property literature

The property literature, as reviewed by page 2007 was dominated by the need to define a body of knowledge and prioritise the disciplines to be taught. However, the process of trying to establish a definitive body of knowledge was not successful because of the different approaches to real estate taken by academics and professionals in different locations around the world. There was general consistency in the importance of providing a more holistic approach to real estate education (Roulac 2002 Vandell 2003, Boyd 2005). In an Australian context Boyd (2005), Elliot and Warren (2005) and Newell (2007) outline the current pressures that will make it more difficult to provide an appropriate education, and Boyd (2007) outlines a possible graduate training program to address some of the issues of developing graduates that universities are not currently doing and further, unlikely to do in the future.

2 Graduate survey, sample and analysis

The graduate survey (fully explained in Page2007a) examines the influences on the individuals' socialization to become a valuer. Graduates were asked about their background and disposition to choose property studies and' in particular' valuation. Graduates were asked specifically about the values, skills and knowledge they believe are critical for valuers and how well their university studies prepared them with respect to these aspects of socialization. Graduates were asked about their professional development since graduation and the role of the employer/mentor on their development. This is important to identify the aspects that influence the socialization of the novice valuer. Interviewees were asked to identify the point that they felt they changed from being a novice to full professional.

Finally, graduates were asked to reflect on their experiences at university and as a novice professional and provide thoughts on improvements or changes that could be made by universities/professional bodies/employers to provide more effective socialization.

Graduates working in three states were interviewed. Each of these States has significant differences in requirements for an individual to be able to act as a valuer. In South Australia, a new graduate can operate as a valuer and the tertiary educational requirement is all that is required for an individual to start operating as a valuer. If an individual is a member of the professional body, then they need to have their valuations countersigned until they achieved Certified Practicing Valuer (CPV) status. In Victoria, there is no licensing of valuers. Valuation work for government or certain firms requires a director

or the valuer to be a CPV recognized valuer with the professional body. In NSW, valuers are licensed. and the licensing authority will provide restricted licenses and graduates can quickly get a license to value residential properties. However it takes longer for an individual to obtain a full license.

The graduate sample was obtained by asking the local API staff in each of the three States to ask for volunteers from those who had achieved CPV status in the preceding 12 months. This meant they had a minimum of two years work experience following graduation and in several cases significantly more than that as they were not encouraged to submit to the CPV examination process. Eighteen graduates were interviewed which included six females and twelve males and graduates who had taken up valuation as a second career.

The epistemology chosen is constructivism which permits the researcher to explore meaning. It allows for different people to construct different views from the same circumstances which is not allowed in some other epistemologies. The theoretical perspective chosen is that of interpretivism which looks at cultural and historical derived interpretations of the world. It allows the researcher to bring their pre-understandings into the research process and allows the researcher to use this knowledge in interpreting the results. This is an important issue as I have been teaching property studies for twenty eight years.

The graduate interviews were initially scanned with respect to contextual information to ensure that the sample covered the diversity of background, work location and programs undertaken. The sample was deemed to be of sufficient size and diversity as the latter interviews were not bringing forth significant new information. The graduate survey was also categorized into themes around the professional socialization aspects of knowledge skills and values and categories with respect to the socialization as a novice professional.

3 Graduate results and discussion
Results of the interviews are discussed in this section under the following sections

3.1   Graduates professional values
Graduates noted the professional values that were critical for valuers were:
- confidentiality'
- resisting client pressure including pressure from a clients ex-spouse
- duty of care.

Pressure from clients was mentioned frequently however, interviewees also said that valuations relating to property divorce settlement were particularly difficult. The pressure was not necessarily from the client but rather the client's partner who was occupying the house. This has changed a little with new family court procedures that require only one valuation. The valuer still felt under pressure to look at all aspects that the house occupier wanted to show them and listen to all the issues about the house. It was important that the lawyers heard that they had undertaken a thorough job. The graduates believe it is a distracting process. The other aspect of this work is the honing of communication skills, as often the house occupier does not want the valuation to occur and is trying to delay the

process. Convincing the house occupier to allow the valuation to be undertaken often requires considerable negotiation, particularly to enable the valuation to occur in a reasonable timeframe.

Several graduates spoke of the pressure exerted by financiers who wanted to force a deal. They indicated this was especially a problem with residential properties. They spoke of a more professional approach being evident with larger corporate clients and also spoke of their employers avoiding working with some firms. The risk management strategy was not to do work for clients that pressured you. The graduates believed the university made them aware of the professional values of confidentiality, resisting pressure and duty of care but that they were not sufficiently prepared for the pressures.

3.2   Graduates skills

Graduates identified five significant skills for valuers:
- communication both written and oral including networking
- rational/logical/analytic skills
- research skills
- computer literacy
- spatial information and analysis skills.

Networking is an essential skill for a valuer. Sharing of data and information on properties is important to be able to undertake the task. Attendance at professional development workshops was identified as an important way to meet people that you may need to contact in the future for advice.

Graduates regarded good written and oral communication skills as being highly important. Though they had produced written reports at university, these 'took on another level' when they had to be written for a client who did not know the property. The report had to describe the property and how the valuer determined its value. The graduate's report had to be internally consistent and the valuer also needed to be able to put their own opinion on paper in a precise and accurate way.

Analytic skills were regarded as critical in processing the available information in order to perform the valuation. Research skills were also considered important because they were required to track down relevant data.

Graduates who had undertaken municipal valuation work in Victoria were required to produce spatial valuation data. This was a skill they believed they were not taught. Graduates from a surveying background indicated that not enough use was made of spatial information. They believed it can provide an important perspective as patterns of values with respect to surrounding properties can be identified. This improves the valuation for the client, making the valuation result more equitable.

The graduates felt they were well prepared for analytical and research tasks but they felt underdeveloped in the area of communication, especially verbal.

3.3 I am a valuer

Graduates were asked when they believed they had become a valuer. The point of acknowledging oneself as being a valuer was generally not State licensing, graduation or achieving certified practicing valuer status with the Australian Property Institute. The general theme from the interviews was that they regarded themselves as valuers when:

> I have people (other professionals) ask for your views on the value of a property. Graduate 15

> I started to rely on my own advice. Graduate 15

> I started to feel that I was adding value. Graduate 17

Three CPVs believed they were still not professional valuers because they did not have specialised knowledge in a field within valuation. They told people they had the valuation credentials but felt they had 'some time to go' to really become a valuer. Some graduates spoke of different times for different valuation types – immediate upon graduation for simple residential valuations, to many years for certain specialised valuations. This is consistent with the program directors' thoughts who gave a range of answers regarding the question of how long they thought it would take to become a valuer. Page(2007b) They also linked this time frame to the property type, i.e. within a month for residential valuations, and up to two years for the more complex commercial valuations.

3.4 Graduate valuer supervision and mentoring

In larger firms there is more of a process of corporate governance in which every valuation leaving the firm must be signed off by a director. Directors also normally have their own work checked by others. The degree of review was generally dependent on the total value of the valuation and the degree of complexity. In small firms or single person firms this could not occur. In contrast, valuers within larger firms could readily call on the expertise of others within their organisation to provide insights on methods to help with data or to have meaningful discussion about aspects of valuation.

Within larger firms there is also an opportunity to rotate work and obtain experience in different valuation fields. There also appears to be a greater expectation that you will obtain your CPV status with colleagues and directors asking about your progress. In small firms, diversity of work depends on the client base of the owner; this could be broad or it could be narrow. If the firm has a narrow valuation work base, e.g. mortgage valuations, then it can be difficult for the graduate to obtain significant experience.

> I had a base of work at xxx and I probably worked for them close on five years but at the same time did a bit of overflow work at a number of other firms around the place. So I always found myself as a contractor and on the outside of everyplace I worked I was just sort of like the relief person. Graduate 1

Several problems were raised that were linked to the size of firm and working as a contractor undertaking mortgage valuations. The graduates were not always mentored or encouraged to develop. Two graduates, who took in excess of five years to achieve full professional status,

had to change cities to obtain the diversity of work experience required (their opinion) and the supervision/ mentoring to prepare them. One graduate speaks of being trapped and unable to obtain the diversity of experience:

> I was getting pigeon holed pretty tightly into just residential. Graduate 1

This can be contrasted with one graduate who worked for a single practice firm where the boss actively encouraged the graduate to attend professional development sessions, arranged for the graduate to do some work with another valuation firm which offered different work, and also arranged for the graduate to do some practice interviews with graduates in another firm.

Problems with the socialization of the novice professional can be overcome to some extent through discussion groups, relevant professional development and work placements with other firms.

Some graduates are often keen to take up work with mortgage valuation firms as they generally earn high initial salaries. The valuation firms which provide the greater breadth of experience and training, pay significantly lower salaries. This can provide significant dilemmas for graduates as they need to consider:

> More money now or more money hopefully in the future? Graduate 1

The API has not necessarily ensured that graduates truly have the professional depth of experience though it has recognised the problem and has been piloting specific workshops to assist graduates obtain the range of experience required. This issue is discussed often by graduates. Some are very concerned that CPV is granted to all when it is obvious some do not have the breadth of experience. There appears to be difference between the states in how the CPV examination process occurs. The API has started to pilot courses specifically for the recent graduate. These need further development to allow graduates who are only working for firms that provide limited diversity of work to gain the broader understanding of property. The main concern was with graduates undertaking mortgage residential valuations. They also need to provide more opportunities for those working in small firms and regional areas. A best practice example is the Geelong Discussion group which had regular meetings in which a guest speaker talked about some issue relevant to the Geelong and surrounding areas e.g. planning change or significant road development and they subsequently discussed the issue and networked. The networking was useful in that they felt confident they could ring other participants for advice or data when undertaking valuations. It is important to note that not all small firms provide a bad experience. One small Victorian valuation firm ensured their graduate got valuation experience that they could not provide by getting their graduate some limited placing in other valuation firms.

3.5   Work experience

Many graduates talked of the benefits of work experience. It provided the professional valuation skills, familiarity and understanding of the terminology, and it assisted them in their studies:

> I know that of those students, those of us who have worked, had a clear advantage, in class we were at different levels. Graduate 4

This increased understanding can prevent the problem of graduate 4's friend who only discovered in their final year with some work experience that they were training for the wrong career.

> I'm not going to be a valuer and for three years that's all he wanted to do and it took him two or three weeks to find out that unfortunately it's not even what he wanted to do. Graduate 4

> I think it's easier in those last years when you're actually working, because what they tell you starts to make sense because you can relate it to what you're doing, whereas in the first two years, you know, they tell you to do a property report and you really had no idea – well, a lot of us, no idea what that was – you had an idea of topics to write under, but I suppose you didn't really understand the objective of doing it, so it made it harder to do, actually write your assignment being, you know, a mock valuation, when you didn't actually understand that end objective. Graduate 9

Work experience was one change to programs that was regularly suggested by graduates. Mentors were also seen as positive but if your mentor was in a property field other than valuation then, once again, relevant work experience was still seen as important. It provided the end context/big picture as well as the opportunity to learn some of the practicalities of valuation.

3.6   Graduate Reflection

> You get the basis but you don't really start learning until you're out there in real life situations. Graduate 17

Graduates, when asked to indicate what they would change over the degree and novice period of socialization, generally answered 'nothing'. They did, however, often make similar statements to that noted above, which indicated they were aware of a big gap between university and practice but unsure how to bridge this gap. Graduates who had worked during their programs believed they were better prepared and felt their studies, or at least understanding, improved following the commencement of work. Several graduates who did not have property work experience believed their socialization to become a valuer would have been improved if they had had either a work placement or a mentor through the program who was working as a valuer.

One graduate noted that he and another more recent graduate did not fully understand while undertaking the property program, why valuations were undertaken. It was only after working for some time as a novice professional that he fully understood the importance of

mortgage valuations and why they were done. This changed his whole approach to writing valuation reports and he understood what the client required in the report.

Several graduates commented on knowledge fields they thought they had missed out on or had too much of. For example, information about rural valuations was insufficient for those working in the country but too much for those working in the city. Building terminology knowledge and discounted cash flows were other areas quoted more than once. The other matter that was often raised was the issue of getting appropriate experience, especially if one was working for a small firm or part of a small team.

4 Conclusion

The graduate interviews identified similar factors to those identified in the literature as being important for the socialization process. It is essential to provide an understanding of the endpoint early in the program and continue to do so throughout the period of study. This is a challenge in Australia where the first year of property programs consist of a common first year with other building or commerce programs and very little contact with property lecturers. A second challenge is which endpoint for us to paint as we market our programs as providing multiple property career endpoints. The end point can be assisted by providing students with work experience and mentors but it is essential that this experience and the mentors provide the appropriate material and experience otherwise that universities efforts, can be sabotaged. The graduates indicated there is greater risk of this in small firms as there are limited people to interact with or to draw on for the appropriate experience. The graduates were generally happy with the knowledge and skills gained at universities with the exception of spatial skills. They were made aware of the professions' values but maybe still not prepared enough for the pressures applied to valuers by clients and other interested parties.

Graduates were concerned about the equity in attaining CPV status with some very sceptical of the breadth of experience of fellow graduates. They believed more should be done by the profession to provide broader experience and knowledge, rather than just granting CPV status to valuers who were perceived to have only undertaken mortgage residential valuations.

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