



EARLY IMPACT

PHD PROGRAM ALREADY HELPING TO RECRUIT FACULTY

Proponents of the PhD program have said from the start that having such a program would be a crucial element in recruiting and retaining faculty.

In at least two cases, those proponents have already been proven right.

Sekar Raju and Laura Smarandescu, both assistant professors of marketing who joined Iowa State in 2007, list the new program as an influence in their decision to come to Ames. Each of them has distinct research interests and styles, but both look forward to the opportunity to work with PhD students once the program is up and running.

So many questions ...

Raju, who earned his PhD at The Ohio State University in 2002 and taught at the University of Buffalo before coming to Iowa State, blends psychology and statistics in his research on brand loyalty and commitment.

“Having a PhD program allows me as a researcher to work with students, not only sharing my knowledge but also getting knowledge from them,” he said. “They come up with new ideas and that is always very exciting. It keeps you up to speed with what’s happening in the field.”

Raju explained that because various research methodologies apply to marketing—ranging from experimental, to econometric modeling, to surveying—there are limitless possibilities for a curious investigator. Those possibilities, he said, only multiply when overlaid with the research areas in Iowa State’s new program; for example, customer relationship management.



“Having a PhD program ... puts you in a different tier of schools.”

LAURA SMARANDESCU

“Whether you are a modeler or an experimentalist, the questions are the same,” he said, “but how you approach them is different. Once you ask a good question, the same thing can be approached in multiple ways. And we don’t see any end in sight to the questions that we can ask.”

Raju looks forward to working closely with PhD students and acknowledges that the relationship with them will be different than it is with other students.

“We look at the PhD students as peers who are just a few years down the line,” he said. “It’s very different than with the MBA program, which is still mostly about imparting knowledge. We’re actually preparing PhD students to carry on the education process.”

Does that make Raju, a relatively young assistant professor, a little nervous?



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SEKAR RAJU

“In some ways it’s challenging, and in some ways it’s frightening,” he said. “I think, ‘Wow, I’m responsible for making that person a success.’ There’s a lot more commitment, and you have to be willing to give a lot of time and involvement.”

... so little time

Talking with Smarandescu is more likely to happen in a hallway than an office because she always seems to be on her way to something. Such is the nature of a young researcher who is planning her next big inquiry before that last one has finished.

She wrote her dissertation at the University of South Carolina about brand alliance, and her work today focuses on judgment and decision making. As she awaits the arrival of the first PhD students, she does not hesitate to apply her research in the undergraduate classes she teaches on consumer behavior. Her approach is a flexible one, and she allows the directed-studies students with whom she works to “write a paper on what they find interesting.”

The same approach, she explained, can apply with PhD students, although at a different level of inquiry. “It’s great to have people who are interested in your area,” she said, “but there will also be students who have their own interests. With them, it’s more a matter of helping them to solve their own questions, or help them with study design basis, or direct them to areas of literature they’re not aware of.”

Such opportunities were among the key influencers in Smarandescu’s choice of Iowa State. “I was trained at a school that was a research school,” she said. “I think that having a PhD program is a commitment a school makes to research, and that puts you in a different tier of schools. When you look at the top schools, they’re mostly research-oriented. I think it’s great for Iowa State.” ■