Proposal to Replace the Decision and Policy Sciences Field in the Public Administration and Policy PhD Program

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The Department of Public Administration and Policy (PAD) at Rockefeller College currently offers a PhD program in which students choose one of the following six fields of study: Comparative and Development Administration, Organizational Behavior and Theory, Decision and Policy Sciences, Politics and Administration, Public Finance, and Public Management. As specified in the graduate bulletin, each field of study comprises at least eight graduate courses selected in consultation with the faculty, in addition to the PhD core courses.¹

Currently, the concentration that houses research in public policy is Decision and Policy Sciences. This description is no longer a good fit for the policy researchers in our department. Accordingly, PAD anticipates proposing to replace the Decision and Policy Sciences field with a Public Policy field. (The proposal will be discussed and is anticipated to be approved at the May 1, 2013 PAD faculty meeting.)

There are two motivations for this change. First, there has been substantial turn-over in the policy-oriented faculty in the department, with the new faculty better described as “policy analysts” than as “decision scientists.” Furthermore, we wish to coordinate with new faculty hires and initiatives in the Political Science department, who are also more suitably described as “policy analysts” than as “decision scientists.”

The curriculum structure for the new Public Policy concentration is similar to the former Decision and Sciences concentration. In addition to the core doctoral courses for all PhD students (28 credits), Public Policy students will take an additional 32 credits, for 60 credits total. To achieve candidacy, students must complete the required coursework, a literature review paper, and an empirical paper; these requirements are consistent across most PhD concentrations.

¹ The bulletin text states: “Students choose a field of study from among the six the department offers: Comparative and Development Administration, Organizational Behavior and Theory, Decision and Policy Sciences, Politics and Administration, Public Finance, Public Management. A field of study is composed of at least eight graduate courses, not to include Ph.D. core courses, chosen in consultation with the faculty. At the discretion of the faculty in the field, students either complete a written comprehensive examination or a professional paper (or a series of papers) demonstrating an understanding of the field and its place in the broader study of public administration and policy.” The language is available at http://www.albany.edu/graduatebulletin/public_admin_policy_phd_degree.htm
The primary curriculum change is with respect to the 32 credits of field courses. Under the proposed concentration, students will take one required public policy field seminar (RPOS 513/RPAD 526, 4 credits), at least 14 credits of advanced methods courses, and additional courses in a substantive and disciplinary area. Through the advanced methods courses, students must develop an advanced proficiency in at least one methodology. Five of the advanced methods credits are comprised of a statistical programming workshop (RPAD 688, 1-credit) and an advanced quantitative methods course (RPAD 725, 4 credits). The public policy field seminar and statistical programming workshop are currently taught on an annual basis, and the advanced quantitative methods course will be first taught in Spring 2014. Faculty anticipate that RPAD 725 will also be of interest to PhD students outside the Public Policy concentration and outside the Public Administration department.

Students will be encouraged to attend the weekly Thursday Policy Lunch brown bag seminar, which has replaced the former weekly Decision and Policy Sciences Brown Bag Lunch. The Thursday Policy Lunch was launched during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The proposed curriculum was developed in a year-long collaborative process. This included extensive discussions with Public Policy faculty in PAD, recently retired faculty in the Decision and Policy Sciences concentration, a review of Public Policy PhD curricula at peer institutions, and meetings with faculty in departments across the university to learn about research methods courses. The PAD faculty will have a final discussion and vote at their May 1 meeting. Faculty hope to have the Public Policy concentration approved by the Graduate Academic Council’s Curriculum and Instruction Committee by the end of the academic year in order to appropriately advise current PhD students and advertise the new concentration to prospective students during recruitment.