

THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, 2005-15

Mission

Faced by the challenges and opportunities that will result from close-to-tripling of size by the year 2015, the School of Social Sciences sees as its mission the development of innovative new programs that quickly reshape the School into a unit with wide national recognition for its multidisciplinary approaches to research and top-flight graduate education while reinforcing its tradition of outstanding undergraduate instruction, public service and close ties to community.

Current Status

Today the School is home to approximately 8.8 percent of the UTD student body (1200 students: 150 Ph.D., 150 MS, and 900 UG) and is responsible for 13.5 percent of the semester credit hours (SCHs) generated on campus (1,000 Ph.D., 1,450 MS and 15,300 UG in the Fall of 2004). There are 60 full time tenured and tenure track faculty members and senior lecturers (56 FTE). The academic programs and degrees are:

- **Crime and Justice Studies** BA (MA and Ph.D. in Criminology are pending)
- **Economics and Finance** BA, BS, MS in Applied Economics, Ph.D.
- **Geography** BA
- **Geospatial Information Science** MS, Ph.D. (offered jointly with the School of Natural Science and Mathematics and the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Sciences)
- **Government and Politics** BA, Ph.D. (MAs in Political Science and Legal Studies are pending)
- **Public Administration** MPA (accredited by National Association of Public Affairs and Administration)
- **Public Affairs** Ph.D.
- **Public Policy and Political Economy** Ph.D. (MS is pending)
Offers specializations in Development Studies and Health Policy, among others.
- **Sociology** BA, MA in Applied Sociology
(offered jointly with Univ. of North Texas)

None of these programs has surpassed the threshold faculty size needed to be included within national rankings. Nonetheless, faculty members have achieved individual distinction. Five have been recipients of the Chancellor's Outstanding Teaching Award. Other faculty include members of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Public Administration, fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the recipient of geography's Vautrin Lud Prize (geography's "Nobel" Prize). Two faculty members have served as program directors at the National Science Foundation, and the School is editorial home to a number of scholarly journals, including the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Electoral Studies*,

Political Behavior, and the *Public Administration Review* – all main-line journals in their fields.

The School has extensive linkages to the North Texas community and beyond. For example, the School was instrumental in the design and implementation of the globally positioned North Texas Regional Information System, now managed by the North Texas Council of Governments. There have been similar relationships with many other community organizations as well as local, state and the federal governments. They include the creation of a unique information system by the Texas Schools Project, strong involvement in local health policy, and the heavy representation by Dallas and other school administrators in the first cohorts of the Ph.D. program in Public Affairs. Under development is a joint research program in spatial epidemiology with UT Southwestern and the transformation of the School's Bruton Center for Development Studies into a leading actor in policy analyses relevant to the North Texas region. The School is actively expanding its work with such organizations as the Foundation for Community Empowerment in ways that provide accessibility to our researchers, graduate education for their employees (including the Ph.D. in Public Affairs), and internship and employment opportunities for our students.

Strategies for Success

Building on these foundations, the School's strategic plan calls for concentrated investment to bolster three initiatives that crosscut its current degree programs and offer an unparalleled opportunity to pioneer innovative new ventures in interdisciplinary research and education that promise new ways to link to the North Texas community and to public policy.

1. Build a Flagship Program in Spatial Social Science.

This initiative is designed to make the newly-approved first-of-its-kind Ph.D. program in Geospatial Information Science, which is offered jointly with the School of Natural Science and Mathematics and the School of Engineering and Computer Science into a "marquee" program from which all other programs in the School draw intellectual power. It builds upon the recognition that geographical and historical contexts bind the social and behavioral sciences and provide a framework for integrating disparate disciplinary approaches, seeking to infuse scholarly activity with an appreciation for space-time contextual effects and to enhance the use and development of the tools for spatial analysis. Initial steps have been taken: approval of the new Ph.D. and the hiring of two of the world's top-ranked spatial analysts, one to a named professorship. Success demands that faculty be added to develop the links with the School's disciplinary programs (criminal justice, economics, political science, public administration and sociology) all of which show stirrings of realization of the contributions that modern spatial analysis can make to their fields. Not only faculty, but also the graduate student body, need to be brought to more-than-threshold scale. This should permit reinforcement of relationships with community and governmental organizations that are the beneficiaries of program's research, the sources of its support, and the employers of its graduates.

2. Develop Nationally-recognized Capabilities in the Analysis of Decision Making.

This initiative builds on faculty contributions to understanding individual, group, organizational, and institutional decision making and links naturally to the School of Management, providing the opportunity for the School to be an active participant in, for example, developments at the interface of psychology and economics, as well as in research on terrorism and global security. At its core is a focus on the role of information, information processing and decision-making rules on the quality of decision outcomes, including risk management. One thrust binds together advances in behavioral and experimental economics with contributions to game theory and to the understanding of the links between individual choices and the behavior of complex systems. Typically, work of this kind has been conducted within narrow disciplinary boundaries. What is unique will be the attempt to capture the synergies from cross-disciplinary methodologies and theoretical insights. First steps in this effort have been the retention of a pioneering young behavioral economist whose research has close links to that of psychologists in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences; the hiring of one of the nation's leading experimental economists who will build an innovative research laboratory; the attraction to a named chair of a leading game theorist and acknowledged expert on terrorism who will create the Center for Global Collective Action, linking his work to rising concerns for homeland security; and the hiring to the political science faculty of an experimental game theorist. Success again demands a critical mass of faculty and first-rate graduate students.

3. Create a Unique Locus for Development of Advanced Research Methodologies in Social and Behavioral Science.

This initiative is seemingly more arcane but is no less essential if the School's objective to become recognized as a leader in innovative interdisciplinary research and education is to be realized. It builds upon and seeks to enhance strengths in categorical and limited dependent variable analysis, covariance structures, time and space series designs, longitudinal and cross-sectional data analysis, and survey design and methodology. It will include the establishment of a Survey Research and Training Center, creating a resource that is lacking today in the North Texas region. Also important will be the regular rotation to and from UTD of leading methodologists for seminars, short courses, joint research, and to contribute to certificate programs. Preliminary steps have been taken by a leading methodologist who was attracted to the School by a named professorship and who has developed the first series of short courses for the School's faculty and students. A new M.S. degree in methodology is planned, building upon the certificate programs. The School has a well-deserved reputation for producing master's and doctoral-level students equipped with high levels of technical skills. This initiative will take these skills to new levels, with a comprehensiveness that is rare among the social sciences.

Requirements for Success

At the current growth rate of 10 percent per year the School is expected to have a student body of 1600 by 2008, 1900 by 2010, 2300 by 2012, and 3100 by 2015. Much of this growth will be at the graduate level. Particularly rapid expansion is expected in Crime and Justice Studies at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and in the MPA and Public Affairs Ph.D. programs.

To service this graduate-heavy growth while maintaining the tradition of outstanding undergraduate education, ensuring that every program surpasses critical minimum effective size thresholds, and realizing the Strategies for Success, the faculty will have to increase in size by 9-10 per year, net of replacements, reaching 80 by 2008, 95 by 2010, 115 by 2012 and 155 by 2015. This estimate is predicated on the current structure of 56 FTE faculty and 1,200 students, or a student-FTE faculty ratio of 21.5:1. (the per semester SCH/FTE ratio is 320:1). Any reduction of these ratios will require commensurate faculty additions. The space occupied by the School will have to increase accordingly – offices will be needed for 95 new faculty; space and labs will be needed to teach almost 2,000 new students; and support staff will need to be housed.

It is essential that the faculty hiring process continue to be “front-loaded” by first attracting more senior researchers who already have secured national and international recognition. It is they who should lead future program development, funded research initiatives, and the recruiting of new faculty and graduate students. What also will be key to the reshaping effort will be their service as role models and mentors to the bright junior faculty who will follow. Not less than 6 of the incremental hires should be to named professorships, raising the number in the School to 10 – essential if candidates of sufficient stature are to be attracted to UTD. A front-loaded strategy will, of course, immediately affect average teaching loads and may need to be countered in the short run by selective hiring of a small number of top-flight senior lecturers to help meet state-mandated teaching responsibilities.

New programs take time to develop, but it is reasonable to set the following goals: by 2015 the Geospatial Information Science program should achieve ranking among the top 5-10 of whatever national peer group emerges; the Ph.D. in Political Science should be among the nationally top-ranked programs with FTE faculty less than 25; the MPA program should be ranked among the top 25 of all NASPAA-accredited programs; and the Crime and Justice Studies program should receive similar national recognition. These goals may be less important than several others, however: growing recognition of the role of the School in innovative interdisciplinary research and education; maintenance of a healthy research portfolio; reinforcement of relationships with the North Texas community, the State of Texas, and Washington, DC; and the production of graduates who are eagerly sought by top-level employers, governments and universities.