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## Educational Policies Committee Program Proposal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, June 22, 2011

Utah State University

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## **ITEM FOR ACTION**

A request from the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology in the College of Humanities and Social Science at Utah State University to restructure the specializations offered in the sociology doctoral program.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Graduate Program in Sociology at Utah State University proposes a modest change in the names of the specializations to be available as part of the doctoral degree.

The current list of approved doctoral program specializations in the Sociology program includes four areas: (a) Demography, (b) Environment and Natural Resource Sociology, (c) Social Change and Development, and (d) Inequality and Social Problems.

The proposed list of new doctoral specializations would include the following: (a) Demography, (b) Environment & Community, and (c) States and Markets. These three areas would replace the existing PhD program specializations.

Taken as a whole, these proposed PhD specializations will not require any major curriculum changes (aside from the development of one or two new substantive graduate seminars to be taught by existing faculty over the next two or three years), and can be handled without new faculty positions or teaching loads.

This proposal was prepared by the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology and has been approved by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Educational Policies Committee, and the Utah State University Faculty Senate.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above proposal and approvals as indicated, the President and Provost recommend that the Board of Trustees approve the proposal from the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Anthropology to restructure the specializations offered in the sociology doctoral program.

RESOLUTION  
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WHEREAS, The Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology proposes to restructure the specializations offered in the sociology doctoral program, and

WHEREAS, The proposed specializations reflect the substantive areas where the department has national comparative advantage, and

WHEREAS, The proposed specializations take best advantage of the strengths of the current faculty, and

WHEREAS, The proposed specializations provide an improved focus for future graduate student recruitment efforts, and

WHEREAS, The proposal has been approved by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Educational Policies Committee and the USU Faculty Senate, and

WHEREAS, The proposal has been approved by the President and Provost of Utah State University;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the Utah State University Board of Trustees hereby approve the proposal from the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology to restructure the specializations offered in the sociology doctoral program, and that this proposal be forwarded to the Utah State Board of Regents of the Utah State System of Higher Education.

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RESOLUTION APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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DATE

## **Modification of Specializations in Sociology Doctoral Program Utah State University**

### **Section I: Request**

The Graduate Program in Sociology at Utah State University proposes a modest change in the names of the official specializations to be made available as part of the doctoral degree.

The current list of approved doctoral program specializations in the Sociology program includes four areas: (a) Demography, (b) Environment and Natural Resource Sociology, (c) Social Change and Development, and (d) Inequality and Social Problems.

The proposed list of new doctoral specializations would include the following: (a) Demography, (b) Environment & Community, and (c) States and Markets. These three areas would replace the existing PhD program specializations.

The Demography specialization would remain unchanged and would continue the existing offerings. The Environment and Community specialization is built entirely around existing curriculum and faculty and includes all of the elements from the former specialization in Environment and Natural Resource Sociology, plus the rural community material that was associated with the existing Social Change and Development specialization. The Politics and Markets specialization will build on existing courses formerly associated with the Social Change and Development and Inequality and Social Problems specializations, plus two new courses that have been developed to fill space freed up by moving from four to three PhD specializations.

Taken as a whole, these proposed PhD specializations will not require any major curriculum changes (aside from the development of one or two new substantive graduate seminars to be taught by existing faculty over the next two or three years), and can be handled without new faculty positions or teaching loads.

A brief description of the three proposed specializations includes:

#### ***Demography:***

This specialization explores the study of population change, including fertility, death, migration and health outcomes. Graduate coursework is provided in social demography, population theories and policies, demographic research methods, and various special topic seminars. The orientation is twofold: (1) basic and policy oriented research on sociological aspects of demographic structure and processes including migration, marriage and fertility, morbidity and mortality, and technical demographic topics such as population estimates and projections; and, (2) the provision of demographic training to domestic and international students relevant to their respective settings. Demographic topics are highly interrelated with issues of central concern involving environmental, community, and social change. Active faculty research endeavors encompass a broad range of local, regional, national, and international projects in the areas of migration and population redistribution, health and disability, family demography, life course and aging, population/environment interactions, labor force, and population estimates and projections.

## ***Environment & Community***

This specialization focuses on the sociology of natural resources, environmental sociology, community theory, and applied community development. The faculty in the Environment and Community Sociology area maintain active research in areas such as natural resource development and social change, resource dependency patterns, land use planning, public participation in environmental planning, social responses to hazardous facility siting, environmental equity and environmental justice concerns, public land management policies, linkages of environmental conditions with population change, and a variety of other natural resource policy and management issues. Faculty members are engaged in numerous cooperative research ventures with colleagues in natural resource sciences, water engineering, and other physical and social sciences.

## ***States and Markets:***

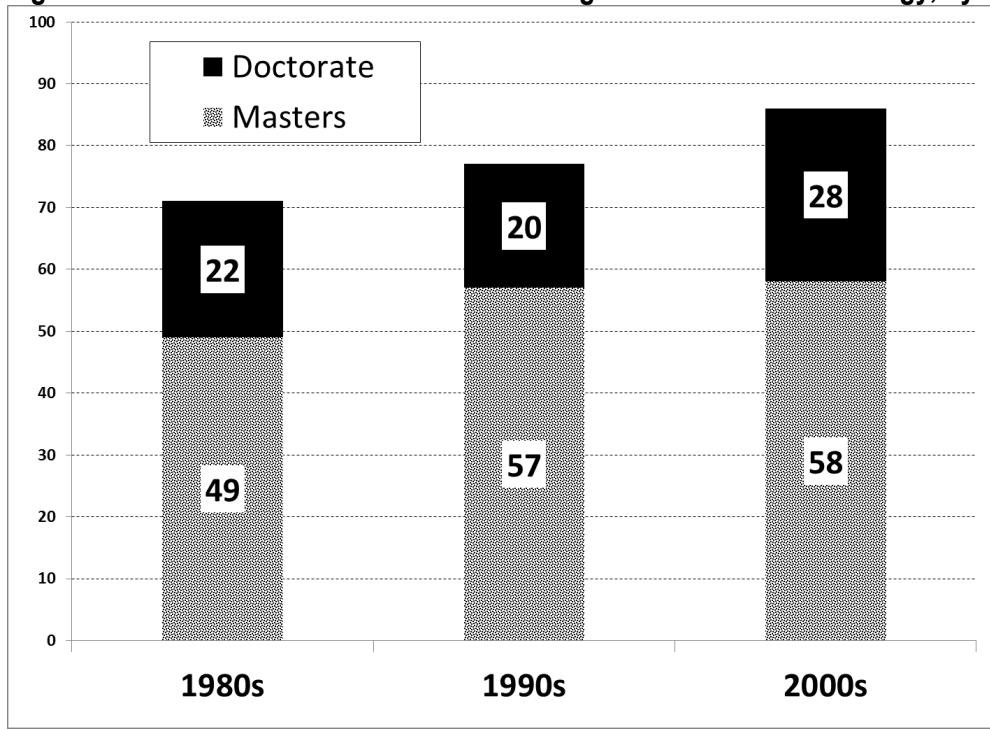
This field of specialization focuses on state-society relationships between formal state institutions (law, policy, and bureaucracy) and the dynamics of private sector markets and social processes. It is supported by new developments in economic sociology that focus on the social and political bases of market processes and in political sociology on the impact of state-level institutions and political processes on social and economic outcomes. Taken together these developments suggest that states and markets are embedded in each other and co-construct one another in important ways. Many important topics studied by faculty within our department – migration behavior, health outcomes, environmental problems, labor market outcomes, community development, etc. – are shaped by this interaction of politics and markets. Developments in the discipline at large to engage this intersection inspire new trajectories of inquiry that motivate the research agendas of a critical core of faculty in the department. Thus neither political sociology nor economic sociology sufficiently captures the existing strengths of faculty research and teaching.

## **Section II: Need**

The graduate program in Sociology has offered the MS degree in sociology since 1927 and the PhD degree since 1957. Over the last two decades, the program has graduated an average of 5.7 MS and 2.4 PhD students per year (figure 1). The program is strong and growing in its national reputation, particularly in the areas of demography, environmental and natural resource sociology, and community sociology.

Recent changes in faculty positions and emerging areas in the broader discipline of sociology have led the current tenured and tenure track faculty in sociology at USU to reevaluate the content of their doctoral degree specializations.

**Figure 1: Number of Master's and Doctoral Degrees Awarded in Sociology, by decade**



A year-long process of internal review and discussion has led to a formal proposal for a new set of three doctoral specializations that reflect the substantive areas where the department has national comparative advantage, take best advantage of the strengths of the current faculty, and provide a more focused set of options around which to develop the department's national reputation and impact on their discipline.

Specifically, the department has decided to focus on two areas in which it has the strongest national reputation (*Demography*, and a new combined area of *Environment & Community*).

In addition, the department is seeking permission to offer a new third specialization area (*States and Markets*) to reflect new trends in the discipline in which sociologists focus on the relationships between formal state institutions (law, policy, and bureaucracy) and the dynamics of private sector markets. A review of nationally prominent sociology doctoral programs found a number of leading institutions using the "States and Markets" title to refer to the integrated study of economic sociology and political sociology (two long-standing specialization areas in the discipline of sociology). The department's interest in pursuing a doctoral specialization in States and Markets reflects the recent hiring of two faculty members whose work falls squarely in this area and the shared interests of several currently tenured faculty members whose research and publications are also a good fit with this new specialization.

The decision to refocus the doctoral specializations was also motivated in response to the retirement of four core tenure-track faculty positions in sociology during a period of time when budget shortfalls precluded filling most vacant positions. While the department did hire to fill one of these positions in 2009/10, and plans to replace one or more of these positions in the coming years, the changes helped stimulate important conversations about the need for a more focused doctoral program identity that would better take advantage of current faculty areas of strength and active research, and help maintain recent departmental progress in the quality of doctoral student applications and placement of their graduates.

The faculty are excited about the opportunity to use the new specialization names in their advertising and recruiting activities to attract students whose interests are particularly well suited to our department's strengths.

The new doctoral specializations will not change the department's MS degree (which is only offered in the generic area of 'sociology') though MS and PhD students share many substantive seminars. It is expected that the evolution of the doctoral course offerings will provide new opportunities for training and recruitment in the MS program as well.

### **Section III: Institutional Impact**

#### ***Overview***

The proposed new set of specializations is explicitly built around the current graduate curriculum offered by the 10 faculty members in sociology at Utah State who actively teach in the graduate program. The proposed specialization areas can be supported without any new faculty positions or increase in the number of graduate course offerings in the department.

Specifically, no new theory or methods courses will be needed to resource the new specialization areas.

The proposed specialization areas of Demography and Environment & Community will rely entirely on substantive graduate seminars currently offered by faculty in the department.

The new area of States and Markets will build on two existing graduate courses (SOC6750 "Social Change and Development," and SOC6310 "Work and Occupations"), and faculty have committed to develop or modify new graduate course offerings (a graduate listing of SOC4350 "Political Sociology" to be offered as a special topics seminar in Spring 2011, a revised version several of the existing seminars to be consolidated and retitled "Theory and Research in Inequality," and a new substantive seminar focused on the topic of States and Markets to be defined and developed in the 2011/12 academic year).

No changes in space requirements or facilities will be required.

If approved, these three specialization areas will provide a better focus for future graduate student recruitment efforts and development of new faculty position descriptions.

#### ***Detailed PhD Requirements***

Specific requirements for the doctoral specializations are governed by departmentally approved graduate program guidelines, which outline the credit and course requirements for the PhD and the specializations. The general requirements for the PhD degree are:

- 60 credits total (post-MS)
- 6 credits of theory (Soc 6750 and 6760)
- 9 credits of methods (Soc 7100, 7110 and 7150)
- 21 credits of electives
  - Major specialization area (12 credits)
  - Minor specialization area (9 credits)

As noted in the sociology graduate program handbook:

“In addition to the theory and methods courses listed above, doctoral students are required to take substantive graduate courses to prepare for their comprehensive examinations and dissertation research. As discussed below, doctoral students will take courses and successfully complete one written comprehensive examination in one MAJOR specialization area. They will also be required to take graduate courses in a second approved MINOR specialization area. Doctoral students should develop a list of electives in consultation with their advisor and supervisory committee to prepare for both Major and Minor specializations. All courses used to meet requirements for the doctoral degree must appear on an approved program of study.

Faculty members affiliated with each specialty area have identified a set of graduate courses in Sociology that are regularly offered and which can be assumed to meet the minimum course credit requirements associated with major and minor specializations.

Doctoral students should use the following course lists as a guide when selecting courses to place on their program of study. Ultimately, the advice and consent of each student’s Supervisory Committee is required to determine the exact courses that can be used to meet doctoral degree requirements.”

**I. Demography**

Soc 6200 – Social Demography  
Soc 6230 – Demographic Techniques  
Soc 7250 – Advanced Social Demography  
Soc 6460 – Sociology of Health & Medicine  
Soc 6800 – Population and Health

**II. Environmental and Community**

Soc 6620 – Environment, Technology and Social Change  
Soc 6630 – Natural Resources and Social Development  
Soc 6640 – Conflict Management in Natural Resources  
Soc 6820 – Applied Community Development  
Soc 7660 – The Environment and Social Inequality  
Soc 7720 – Community Theory and Research

**III. States and Markets**

Soc 6310 – Work and Labor Markets  
Soc 6350 – Political Sociology  
Soc 6800 – Topical Seminar in States and Markets  
CONTRIBUTORS FROM EXISTING DEPT COURSES  
Soc 6630 – Natural Resources & Soc Devt  
Soc 7660 – Environment & Social Inequality

**Section IV: Finances**

The proposed changes in doctoral specializations should not have any significant fiscal impact on the department, college or university. All proposed courses will be covered by current faculty.