General Social Science major  
Response to questions from the Undergraduate Council  
May 14, 2010

The Undergraduate Council discussed the proposal for a revised General Social Science major at its April 8, 2010 meeting and raised a number of questions and concerns. Those questions are reproduced below with responses from the College of Arts and Sciences. The Deans in the College of Arts and Sciences welcome the opportunity to discuss the proposal in more detail at your next meeting and to engage in dialog that will improve the proposal and better serve the needs of undergraduate students at the University of Oregon.

- Will there be enough advising available for majors given that there is only one part-time NTTF to run the program? General Science, for example, hires GTFs to advise its majors (and is a smaller program than GSS is envisioned to be).

This is a legitimate concern. The submitted proposal focuses on the curricular content and organization rather than ongoing administration, but the program will be staffed as needed. To clarify our thinking about the administrative structure for the major we added the following new paragraph to the proposal (on page two of the proposal after the description of the Advisory Board):

“Because the GSS major is not housed in a specific department, the role of student advising will be of central importance. The Director and Faculty Advisory Board will be charged with developing a coordinated advising effort between and among the participating Social Science departments and the Director will be responsible for overseeing the advising for the GSS major. In addition, the Director and Faculty Advisory board will be responsible for informing the CAS Dean's office of the changing advising needs for the GSS major that are likely to come with its anticipated growth. The CAS Dean’s office is committed to ensuring that the GSS major has sufficient advising resources commensurate with its student credit hours. Thus, new staff will be hired as demand warrants.”

- The faculty commitment to this major, not just to individual courses within it, is unclear. Again, there is some concern that one part-time NTTF will not be enough to run the major. Most proposals that have come before the Council – particularly interdisciplinary ones – have had a core group of faculty who are intellectually committed to the program and are dedicated to running it (updating the lists of courses, advising students, handling petitions, monitoring the general level of quality, ensuring intellectual coherence, etc.).

We agree that one part-time NTTF is not sufficient to run such a major if it is successful and we will allocate appropriate resources commensurate with student demand. The College of Arts and Sciences administers 49 degree programs with over 500 faculty serving approximately 11,000 students. We are equipped to marshal the necessary resources to serve UO students who must select a major. When the UO began accepting many more students than typical (approx. 1,000 more in AY 2008/09 than in previous
years) the vast majority needed to be accommodated in the College of Arts and Sciences (because UO professional schools did not substantially increase the number of majors they accepted). The excess demand generated has strained capacity in many CAS majors and the General Social Science major is intended, in part, to meet the needs of those students. We are prepared to increase professional advising staff (not just graduate student advisors) to meet undergraduate student demand.

Moreover, we feel that it is important that the oversight of the major fall to the tenure track faculty. This is why the proposal as endorsed by the CAS Curriculum Committee includes the following description of the advisory board that speaks directly to the Undergraduate Council’s concerns:

“The General Social Science (GSS) major will be administered by a director and overseen by a Dean-appointed faculty advisory committee comprised of three faculty from participating social science departments and undergraduate advisors from participating departments (who will serve in an ex officio capacity). The director, assisted by a staff coordinator, will be charged with running the day to day operations of the major including coordinating and publicizing class offerings and advising students via sponsoring departments. The Director will meet with the advisory committee in Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters. The Fall advisory board meeting will consider curricular issues including the possibility for the approval of drops, additions, and changes to the list of approved courses to satisfy the GSS major requirements. Assessment of course offerings will include consultation with social science department heads and undergraduate advisors so that the four GSS tracks can evolve as new courses become available or as changes in faculty (or faculty preferences) lead to existing courses being changed or no longer taught. The GSS major is comprised solely of classes offered regularly by departments at UO, mostly in the College of Arts and Sciences. The GSS director and GSS advisory committee will rely on departments for their approved courses to satisfy “group-satisfying” and “multicultural” requirements. The GSS director and advisory board are also charged with coordinating with other colleges to ensure that appropriate courses outside the college are included in the GSS major and insuring that the courses listed for the Social Science Teacher track continue to satisfy Oregon state certification requirements.”

- Have the undergraduate advisors in participating departments been consulted about their willingness to participate ex officio in running the GSS program? Many are overworked already.

The Dean’s office oversees advisors for individual majors housed in a wide range of administrative units. The job descriptions and workloads of those advisors are monitored and adjusted as needed. Over the course of the past year the Task Force developing this proposal, and subsequently Dean’s office representatives, consulted with the heads of the social science departments in the college who have responsibility for overseeing staff and faculty who advise students. When this proposal is approved and a Director is hired and a Faculty Advisory Committee is appointed, then a staffing plan will be developed. The development of that staffing plan will include extensive conversations with advisors in
existing programs as well as with department heads, budget managers, and officers of administration within departments and programs. We are fully aware of the University’s HR policies and procedures and the staffing plan for this major will conform to them. In anticipation of developing this staffing plan we have submitted the GSS proposal to affected department heads and asked them to share this proposal with their advisors, pointing them to the specific issues around advising in the proposal and asking them to share any comments or concerns. We have incorporated their comments into the revised proposal and have attempted to address the concerns that they raised. Note that this proposal does not intend to raise the number of students majoring in social sciences, but rather to construct new tracks within the social sciences that better match the interests and career paths of existing students. Insofar as social science advisors will need to be aware of the requirements of another major, this GSS proposal does put some demands on advisors in departments like Political Science and Economics to learn about the new majors. At the same time, being able to direct students to a program like General Social Science promises to reduce the overall workload of advisors within these heavily impacted majors.

- Can we ensure that GSS students will have access to the courses they need (particularly if majors in regular disciplines get first dibs at registration and enrollment pressures are building already in many of these disciplines)? Some courses in the social studies teaching track, for example, tend to be limited to students in the College of Education. Cooperative agreements may need to be sought between GSS and other units whose courses GSS majors will need. Because GSS majors register at the same time as all CAS students for courses they will not be shut out of any courses in the College at any rate different from those majoring in a particular subject. It will be important for the Director to be in contact with Department Heads in the College to make sure that the gateway courses in each of the tracks have sufficient slots. The courses in the professional schools also do not present a problem. Specifically, the courses in the Business School in the Applied Economics track are exclusively for non-business majors and are available to CAS majors. For the other courses for the GSS major in the other professional schools (i.e., AAA, SOE, SOJC), we have now worked out an arrangement with the Deans of these schools to permit GSS majors to register in these courses either at the same time as their majors or with a certain number of reserved spots. Thus, we have followed the recommendation of the Undergraduate Council to explicitly develop these cooperative arrangements with other units on campus outside the College.

- What will be the impact, under the new budget model, on social science departments who lose students to this major? Is the proposal supported by these departments? What has their reaction been to it? How will they be expected to make the “adjustments” to course offerings (p. 38) and “reallocation[s] of faculty” (p. 45) that the new major will entail?

These are conversations we have held with all department heads in CAS and we have explored various scenarios with participating Social Science departments. In particular, we have acknowledged the possibility that the number of majors in the core disciplines
could decline as the result of the GSS major, but have also assured the participating departments that they will not be penalized for a decline in majors as a result of students participating in the GSS major. Specifically, in the budget model context, departments will still receive credit for student credit hours in their courses, and all courses will still be offered through core departments. Thus, the GSS major should maintain enrollments for most high demand disciplines and should also benefit some social science departments that presently have excess capacity. It is true that majors also count in the budget model. However, the budget model implications for majors apply only at the College (and not the department) level. The College is committed to empirically tracking the number of GSS majors in each of the tracks and recognizing each department’s instructional contribution to the GSS major. This assurance is particularly important to the Economics Department where the GSS major is expected to directly siphon off present economics majors who have more applied economic interests afforded by the GSS major. We anticipate that the Economics Department will benefit from the GSS program because they have trouble accommodating high demand and there are many students with interests in applied economics who will be attracted to the GSS major. Students who are interested in applied economics should appreciate the GSS track because their interests are not currently well served by the highly technical content of the regular economics major.

- Has careful attention been paid to prerequisites so as to ensure that required GSS courses don’t entail additional coursework unstated in the proposal? (The CASCC delegate on the Council said this had in fact been looked into.)

The short answer is “yes”. We developed the GSS tracks with explicit attention to making sure that students can complete the GSS major without taking additional courses (prerequisites). It is important to note that some track-appropriate courses that have additional prerequisites were included in the tracks to permit students the opportunity to take these courses if they fit their broad interests in the track on the assumption that some students would be willing to take the necessary prerequisites. For instance, some classes in the Crime and Law track require prerequisites, but to obtain advanced knowledge in the area we thought that students might elect to fulfill those prerequisites to gain the topical knowledge about crime, deviance, and social control. Nonetheless, we also made sure that the GSS major is sufficiently flexible that the vast majority of courses are not going to serve as a barrier to completing any particular track. The CASCC did look into the issue of prerequisites and confirmed our assessment. In addition, the major will be reviewed in an ongoing manner so that adjustments to required and optional courses will be made as we assess student participation and success in accomplishing requirements in a timely fashion. As with any major, when bottlenecks or omissions in the curriculum develop, the Director of the program, in consultation with a faculty advisory board and under the supervision of an Associate Dean and Dean, will make adjustments as needed.

- There was a general feeling that the tracks should be defined in such a way as to focus a student on a well-defined subject not currently covered by other majors. Some argued that some degree of specialization and focus are necessary in any undergraduate course of study, whereas the GSS tracks offer perhaps too much flexibility and not enough coherence.
As proposed, the GSS major lays out four tracks but also encourages students to select concentrations within each of the tracks. Concentrations within tracks will link students to specific career objectives by recommending specific courses. These lists of courses will be developed by the Director in consultation with the Faculty Advisory Board and students will be told about these recommended concentrations by the GSS advisors, as well as by advisors in Oregon Hall, in CAS, and within the departments. The concentrations will encourage students to develop an understanding of a particular subject area and help them achieve a particular career objective. For example, the Crime, Law and Society track is likely to include students who are interested in specializing in criminology with potential careers in law enforcement, criminal justice, or corrections. This criminology concentration would recommend core courses of SOC207, Social Inequality; PS275, Legal Process; and ES101, Introduction to Ethnic Studies; along with the required methodology course SOC311, Introduction to Social Research. To fulfill the other course requirements, the criminology concentration might recommend that the student select six from among the following: ES 452 Race and Ethnicity and the Law, FHS 482 Prevention of Youth Violence, FHS 483 Prevention of Interpersonal Violence, PS 485 Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, SOC 345 Race, Class, and Ethnic Groups, SOC 380 Introduction: Deviance, Control, and Crime, SOC 480 Crime and Social Control, SOC 484 Issues in Deviance, Control, and Crime, SPED 411/511 Foundations of Disability I, WGS 321 Feminist Perspectives: Identity, Race, Culture; ANTH 366 Human Osteology Laboratory (Coreq. ANTH 270); ANTH 413 Culture and Psychology.

Another concentration in the Crime, Law and Society track will be Pre-Law. This concentration could include, in addition to the preliminary core and methodology requirement, a recommendation to take six of the following specialization courses: ES 452 Race Ethnicity and the Law; J 385 Communication Law; J 496 Communication Ethics and Law; LING 415 Semantics; PHIL 325 Logic, Inquiry, and Argumentation; PHIL 344 Introduction to Philosophy of Law; PHIL 425 Philosophy of Language; PS 468 Congress; PS 470 Constitutional Law; PS 484 United States Supreme Court; or PS 485 Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. These concentrations and specific course recommendations, along with others, will be developed by the Director and Faculty Advisory Board once they are appointed. We did not want to dictate what those specific requirements would be, and we wanted to allow time for departments to develop new courses to complement the major. For example the Anthropology Department is working to develop a course on Forensics, and this might be added to list, or might replace the Human Osteology course in the proposed list above.

Stepping back from the details of specific concentrations within tracks, it should be noted that the current proposal is more focused on coherent topical tracks than earlier draft versions of the General Social Science proposal and much more focused on specialized areas of study than the General Social Science major currently offered as a UO degree through the Bend/Cascades campus. The balance between focus and flexibility was discussed at length during development of this proposal in a variety of settings including among the Task Force, in departments, among department heads, and within the CAS Dean’s office. The point above about classes requiring prerequisites was a limiting factor on how much topical focus was possible without drastically increasing the number of
units required for a particular GSS track. We decided to err on the side of flexibility in the initial framing of the major for two reasons. First, we felt it was important to ensure that students would have an opportunity to graduate with a GSS major without worrying about being able to get specific courses beyond the core courses that were perceived as central to the theme of the track. Second, we wanted students to be able to develop a flexible curriculum to tailor the courses to their job interests; thus, for example, a person interested in working in corrections, as a parole officer, or as a police officer might best be served by a distinctly different set of courses than someone interested in studying in the same track with the interest of going to law school. Thus, all of the courses listed are generally consistent with the central theme of the track, but also broad enough such that the student is not limited to a narrowly defined application of the study. We thus expect that students, working with an advisor, will need to focus their studies within each track to the sorts of content that make sense for their personal and career goals.

At the same time that there is some flexibility within tracks, each of the tracks has a breadth, methodology, and specialization requirement. The breadth requirement ensures that students are exposed to a variety of approaches to problems in the social sciences. The methodology requirement ensures a familiarity with quantitative and qualitative understanding of social science data that will make them conversant with basic analytic techniques in their area of study. Finally, the specialization requirement permits the student an opportunity to delve more deeply into a particular subject so that they can speak with some authority on a particular area of the social sciences. These are essential elements of civic and cultural demands of citizenship, particularly combined with the general education and elective components of a UO undergraduate degree.

Finally, the core courses (including an explicit methodology requirement in every track except the Social Science Teacher track) ensure that students will be exposed to a well-defined set of common skills that provide pedagogical cogency to each track. These requirements mirror those of specific disciplines but also recognize that boundaries between disciplines are shifting and that developing an interdisciplinary focus for one’s studies can benefit the individual and society. Beyond the flexibility with track-specific requirements, we also permit flexibility in the GE requirements by allowing students to receive a BA or BS degree, which will allow students to pursue their strengths in language or technical courses.

- What defines each of the four tracks besides a list of required and elective courses? There is no stated intellectual rationale for any of them. We need at least one concise paragraph officially defining each track in order to prevent confusion about its mission and avoid intellectual “drift” as course offerings need updating in the future. The director of the program should have some kind of description for each track to fall back on and consult in determining which courses are to be included or excluded. Otherwise, there is the risk that as students (or even instructors) petition to count certain courses for GSS credit, ad hoc exceptions will be made with essentially no check.

Initially many more tracks were suggested as noted in our proposal, and in the future, more tracks might be added. This initial focus on four tracks was developed with regard
for student demand, career possibilities, intellectual coherence and course availability. We agree that an overarching description of each track would provide more explicit direction for the first director of the GSS program, and we concur that each of the tracks should initially include a brief paragraph that provides an overall intellectual rationale for the track. Below we offer such paragraphs:

The Crime, Law and Society track is designed to provide the student a broad exposure to problems that confront society relating to the causes, consequences, and policy proscriptions regarding crime and sociolegal studies. The Crime track offers a flexible curriculum designed to provide an excellent preparation for persons who have an interest in criminology, law school or working in law enforcement or social services.

The Geo-politics, Environment, and Policy track focuses on applied policy as it relates to broad social-political and environmental issues at the regional, country-specific and global levels. The Geo-politics track will provide training for students hoping to work in green industry, NGOs, and other international environmental organizations and for going on to earn graduate degrees in planning, public management, policy studies or other applied social sciences with a geo-political emphasis.

The Applied Economics, Business, and Society track in the General Social Science major is designed to provide the student an applied economics background combined with accounting and finance courses. The Applied Economics track provides a combination of skills that yields an excellent preparation for persons interested in going on to earn an MBA or working in business or government.

The Social Studies Teaching track is designed to ensure that students meet the coursework requirements for admission to the graduate teacher licensure program at the University of Oregon – UOTeach. The program does not in and of itself lead to a teaching license, but provides a well-defined content for students interested in teaching Social Studies at the middle or high school level and provides them the appropriate background for post-baccalaureate study and licensure.

- Would it be possible to produce a grid or table of lower- and upper-division requirements, core vs. elective requirements, etc. for each track? Currently it’s hard to visualize the curriculum, nor is it clear in every case how the number of credits adds up to between 56 and 68.

This is an excellent idea and we constructed such a table. See attached.

- What limitations, if any, should be put in place to prevent GSS students from double-majoring in one or more related fields? Given the wide array of courses that count for most tracks, overlap with multiple majors is almost automatic. (This complements Sue Eveland’s concern about combining the GSS major with one or more minors.)

This is another good suggestion that we have discussed and adopted. We discussed this with the various departments and programs when we developed the proposal and reached
a consensus, but the GSS proposal did not make the resolution explicit. We amended the most recent proposal to include the following language (which had been agreed to in previous discussions). “Because of the cross disciplinary nature of the General Social Science Program, students are not eligible to double major or minor in any social science field. However, students are permitted to major or minor in departments in the humanities or sciences.”

- How will students in the Applied Economics track be expected to succeed in gaining admission to MBA programs (p. 40) if it is anticipated that many will be too weak to thrive in the Business School or the Economics major?

This is another good question and addresses an important aspect of the Applied Economics track. Many students who have been shut out of the business school (in part because of a lack of technical skill) end up attempting to major in economics, which, ironically, requires even more technical skill than a business administration undergraduate major. The Applied Economics track will give these students an opportunity to develop their applied interests in economics and business without having to unnecessarily go through the technical content in economics (that ostensibly they do not have an interest in, or perhaps in which they lack aptitude). This applied preparation will be similar to that which they receive in the business school, but will also give them the applied economic knowledge that will prepare them for an MBA and/or a subsequent career in business. It should be noted that most colleges and universities do not offer undergraduate degrees in business, so lacking such a degree does not necessarily disadvantage applicants to business schools in the United States.

- The number of credits for the social studies teaching track seems both too high and too focused on lower-division credits compared to, say, the History major. Again, there is little sense of focus or accumulation of skills in the track. What are the actual Oregon state requirements for social studies teaching? Is this track the best way for students to prepare themselves to become social studies teachers?

As stated in the description of the Social Studies Teaching track, the included courses are designed to ensure that students meet the coursework requirements for admission to the graduate teacher licensure program at the University of Oregon – UOTeach. Jeff Edmundson, who is in charge of curriculum for the UOTeach program in the Graduate School of Education, has been instrumental in putting together the list of courses and will serve as our contact to ensure GSS Teacher track course requirements are up-to-date with the UOTeach program. The UOTeach program, and the state as a whole, have adopted the National Council of Social Studies recommendations and standards. These standards do not require specific courses, but instead have a content requirement related to passing the national exam for social studies teachers. Thus, the required courses and their distribution across the areas of study are following national standards for social studies teachers. Thus, while the committee may have an objection to the “little sense of focus” of the track, this approach is one provided by national licensure guidelines. While it is true that there are more upper-division courses in specific major, realizing that major does not meet state requirements for a social studies teacher. Some UO students have been majoring in a specific social science discipline (e.g., sociology, political science,
history) with the expectation that this will prepare them to move them into a teacher education program that will license them to teach social studies. Oregon standards, following the National Council, now require preparation across a range of social science disciplines rather than in a single discipline. The current proposal with emphasis on mastery of multiple content areas as defined by licensure requirements is likely the best way for a student to be “efficiently” prepared for meeting the state requirements to become a social studies teacher at the middle or high school levels.