

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM IN DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS (DASA)**

Self-Study for Academic Program Review  
2004-2009

### **SECTION 1: ANALYSIS OF PAST REVIEWS**

1. There have been no prior separate reviews of the DASA program.

### **SECTION 2: ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PROGRAM**

#### **1. Overview of the Interdisciplinary Program**

a. The DASA concentration is an intensive one-year Master's program in applied demography, sponsored jointly by the Schools of Social Sciences and Social Ecology (students choose which MA degree to be awarded – either an MA in Social Sciences or Social Ecology, with a concentration in Demographic and Social Analysis). DASA enrolled its first class (seven students) in the fall of 1999. DASA has awarded 72 MA degrees since its inception.

A Graduate Director (Matt Huffman, Associate Professor of Sociology) and an Assistant Director (Joanne Christopherson, Lecturer in the Social Sciences), with oversight from a faculty steering committee and the Sociology Department, are charged with the hands-on administration of the program. Operating budget, a graduate fellowship block allocation and 0.25 time clerical assistance are furnished by the School of Social Sciences. Support from Social Ecology is furnished in the form of course releases and computing resources. Upon entering the program, students are assigned a faculty advisor based on their interests. In addition to the usual mentoring functions, the primary role of the Advisor is to guide and mentor the student as he or she works on the end-of-the-year project, described in detail below. Students are free to change advisors at any time during their tenure in the program. In the past, Advisors have been drawn from several departments in the Social Sciences and Social Ecology. In addition, Advisors have come from the Department of Education and the Merage School of Business. DASA's five-course core curriculum uses pre-existing offerings by Sociology and other faculty. DASA benefits from significant participation by Social Ecology faculty, but such participation has yet to generate commensurate participation by Social Ecology students, as an overwhelming majority of DASA students have chosen to take the MA degree in Social Sciences. Since its inception, all but one of the DASA Directors have come from Sociology, while the program's only Assistant Director is a Lecturer in the Social Sciences). The Assistant Director position has only existed since 2007, and is essential to the program's success, especially in the absence of staff and clerical support.

b. Please see Table 1, attached.

c. Visiting faculty in the Social Sciences and Social Ecology occasionally teach demography related graduate courses. This happens on an ad hoc basis.

d. The DASA program is administered by the Director and Assistant Director, as described above. Faculty from Sociology teach the five required courses that make up the core of DASA's curriculum, while faculty in the School of Social Ecology contribute significantly as well, through teaching, curricular development, and student mentoring and evaluation.

e. As a one-year applied demography program, DASA is quite unique. This limits the usefulness of comparisons. However, there is solid evidence that DASA effectively trains students to enter careers and top doctoral programs.

f. DASA maintains very cordial and productive working relationships with the home departments of its affiliated faculty.

g. Please see Table 2, attached. DASA receives very little staff or clerical support. Some support is provided by the Department of Sociology. However, Sociology has experienced tremendous faculty growth in recent years, without proportionate expansion of staff support. As a result, the Sociology staff is overextended. DASA would benefit tremendously from having its own, dedicated support personnel. Generally, DASA operates with a graduate fellowship block allocation, which be used only to support the research activities of enrolled students. It cannot be used for recruitment. Funds are also provided to offer only a small number of students in the form of one quarter of support (in the form of a TAship) and non-resident tuition for the academic year. In the 2009 recruiting season, we were allocated four quarters of TAships to distribute to the DASA cohort of 14 students. Although most students are local, and therefore pay only in-state tuition and fees, most pay their own way through the DASA program. Some expenses are normally offset by small research stipends (paid with funds from the block allocation), but these are small relative to their fees and other expenses. The inability for DASA to offer most incoming students any financial support limits the program's ability to enroll high quality students in two ways: First, it impacts recruitment at the application stage, by limiting what can be offered as a financial enticement to apply, and second, at the point at which students have been offered admission but are in the process of deciding whether to enroll. Thus, it not only affects the pool (when students do not apply when they hear that most students are not be funded) and the subsequent yield (when students decide against enrolling because they cannot afford to come, or enter a program that makes them a better offer). Finally, incoming DASA students are not offered spaces in Graduate Student Housing, further compounding the funding issue by leaving students to fend for themselves in an often prohibitively expensive rental market.

Because most DASA students do not TA, they are not provided with campus office space. However, when they are employed as a TA they occupy coveted office space in the overcrowded Social Science Tower, which houses TAs from Sociology as well as other Social Science departments. While a serious concern for many departments, DASA is affected less severely due to the small number of its students employed as a TA in any given quarter.

## **2. Evaluation of Graduate Program**

### **a. Admissions**

(i) Please see Table 3, attached.

(ii) Despite a limited recruiting budget and very limited staff support, DASA has succeeded in enrolling high quality students. Applicants and enrollment are drawn heavily from UC Irvine (for example, 8 of the currently enrolled 14 students are from UC Irvine). Although DASA applicants have a stronger career orientation than traditional applicants to Ph.D. programs, the GPAs and GRE scores of DASA students compare favorably well. Although the top DASA applicants are very strong, we would like to see the lower end of our applicant pool grow stronger. This will not occur unless DASA can draw more a larger number of applicants, especially from other universities. The quality and size of a typical DASA applicant pool does not support significant program growth. To this end, DASA could benefit from more active and formalized recruitment. Formal recruitment has been done by brochure mailings to demography and related programs. The DASA Director also uses his personal contacts to recruit. In addition, the Director uses conference attendance as a way to generate potential applicants, also through personal contacts. Applicants also find DASA and learn about the program through its web site; however, we note that DASA receives very little web support, and none on a consistent, ongoing basis. The DASA Assistant Director herself has been maintaining and updating DASA's website for the last several years. Although technical questions are answered by the School's of Social Sciences' computer support personnel, the regular, hands-on maintenance and updating of the web site have been done by DASA's Assistant Director. The lack of dedicated support personnel makes it difficult for the Directors to maintain a DASA website that is as current and professional as we would like. This is unfortunate, given the internet's importance in recruitment and the dissemination of important programmatic information.

Finally, DASA hosts a yearly alumni night, usually in January. It features several DASA alumni who form a "career panel" – each giving a brief presentation about their current employment, how they got there, and the role DASA played in their training and job market success. Presentations are followed by questions from the audience. The event usually draws about 20-25 individuals, and allows potential students to learn about DASA, meet current and former students, and mingle with DASA faculty and the Directors during the informal dinner reception that follows the panelists' presentations. Although not formally a recruiting event, the alumni night consistently generates several applicants (although they are typically from UC Irvine). Alumni night is an important recruiting tool.

For DASA to grow and/or improve the quality of its students, it needs to improve and better institutionalize its recruitment methods. Growth of DASA is absolutely contingent on improving the size and quality of the applicant pool. The limited recruitment budget and lack of staff support severely hinders this effort.

(iii) Despite few specific efforts to specifically target underrepresented groups in its recruitment activities, DASA's racial-ethnic and gender profile is not dramatically different from other Social Sciences graduate programs at UC Irvine. Retention of underrepresented groups has not been problematic; however, DASA could do more to recruit students from these populations as part of a reenergized recruitment strategy. For example, the Director and/or Assistant Director could visit local campuses with high minority enrollments (for example, CSU Long Beach), and actively recruit students there (by, for example, giving a brief presentation in a large Sociology or Economics undergraduate class). This may increase the size of our applicant pool generally, and have the salutary effect of generating a higher number of applications from underrepresented groups.

## b. Training

(i) The DASA program comprises two parts: Coursework and an end-of-the-year project. The three quarters of DASA coursework include a 5-course core curriculum (two quarters of demography, two quarters of graduate-level statistics, and one quarter of research design). During fall quarter, students take two required courses and one elective, chosen to fit with their academic or professional interests. The two required courses for fall quarter are (1) Population and (2) Demographic Analysis. The winter quarter schedule follows the same basic structure of two required courses and one elective. The winter quarter requirements are (1) Graduate Statistics II and (2) Research Design. Note that DASA students do not normally take the first quarter of the Sociology Department's graduate statistic sequence (Graduate Statistics I, offered each fall). Rather, they begin in the second quarter of the sequence, with Graduate Statistics II. Additionally, most DASA students choose to participate in the optional 4-day statistics "refresher course" offered the week prior to the commencement of fall classes (DASA cost-shares with Sociology to fund the teaching of the refresher course). It is normally taught by an advanced Sociology graduate student, and brings students up to speed on the material covered in the first quarter of the statistics sequence. In spring quarter, DASA students take only one required course (Graduate Statistics III), and two electives. This provides maximum flexibility as they work toward completion of their DASA end-of-the-year project, which is the second major program requirement. This requires students complete an original, empirical project (in nearly all cases, an analysis of secondary data) that addresses some problem, issue or question relevant to demographic analysis. Additionally, all DASA students are required to present their project to faculty from DASA and other programs at the end of spring quarter. The presentation, which largely follows the format of an academic conference presentation, constitutes the students' "exit exam" – faculty are invited widely and ask students questions after each student's presentation. Members of the DASA Executive Committee meet and assess each student's presentation and general performance in the program. Along with coursework, satisfactory completion of both the final project (and associated paper) and presentation are required to earn the MA degree with a DASA concentration.

(ii) Please see Table 4, attached. As described above, a small percentage of DASA students are awarded TAships, either as part of an initial funding package, or at other times during their year in the program. A very small percentage receive in-state or out-of-state tuition; most pay their own way. DASA provides some financial assistance through research stipends paid through the block grant, but this is not a major form of support for the students. Moreover, the DASA budget has been cut by approximately 40% recently.

(iii) DASA has not instituted any formal, systematic means for measuring graduate student satisfaction, which would require substantial staff support. However, strong anecdotal evidence suggests that student satisfaction is not grounds for concern, at least in the short term. Students often tell the Director or Assistant Director that they are generally quite happy and satisfied with the program, and that it lives up to their high expectations. Alumni are quite eager to come back to campus for alumni night, events are well attended and there is low attrition. Students cite the cohesiveness of the cohort and a non-competitive, but highly professional orientation among their classmates as key strengths of the program. They report that they feel that the program yields important contacts that will endure well beyond their one year in the program. DASA students, by and large, are convinced that they are receiving top-notch training and are generally optimistic about their job market prospects. On the other hand, some students cannot

take the electives they want due to scheduling conflicts between electives and DASA- required courses. This may be unavoidable in a one-year program since there are not many chances to take the electives one desires. Also, some students have voiced concern about the size of the Graduate Statistics II and III courses, which DASA students take with the Sociology graduate students. This combination makes for a quite large class (there are usually approximately 12-15 Sociology students enrolled, along with a small number of students from other programs and departments). Adding the DASA cohort results in a very large class (often more than 30 students). This is not ideal pedagogically, and it also imposes a serious burden on the Sociology faculty member who teaches the course. This is especially problematic during Graduate Statistics III (spring quarter), when the DASA students are in the throes of their end-of-the-year project. The faculty member teaching Graduate Statistics III becomes the *de facto* advisor for many DASA students who seize the opportunity to monopolize office hours (and appointments) with statistical questions relating to their projects. Offering the DASA students their own, separate two-quarter Graduate Statistics sequence is highly advisable, despite the associated staffing and budget issues it would invariably raise. Although serious now, this would become a more critical issue if DASA were to grow significantly.

(iv) DASA students employed as teaching assistants are required to complete the University-wide Teaching Assistant training, offered yearly, prior to the start of fall quarter instruction. Because of the limited funding packages offered to entering DASA students, only a small percentage of DASA students work as Teaching Assistants.

Professional socialization also occurs primarily through the following avenues:

(1) *Required workshops and short courses.* DASA students are required to attend a two-hour workshop on working with data from the U.S. Census (offered by the UCI Social Science Research Librarian). In addition, the students attend a required two-hour intensive course in Microsoft Excel, usually taught by the DASA Assistant Director. Finally, DASA students are required to complete a short course on Microsoft Powerpoint, which not only addresses proficiency with the software, but also professional presentation skills more generally.

(2) *Talks, informal brown bags, and meetings.* As a routine practice, DASA students are encouraged to attend talks and brown bags hosted by various departments and campus research centers (for example, the Center for Demographic and Social Analysis and the Gender, Work and Family Research Group). The DASA Director and Assistant Director strive to make students aware of these informal learning opportunities and the important role they play in their training. DASA also hosts a yearly “kick-off” colloquium every fall. This event features a big-name speaker and usually draws a crowd of 40-60 attendees from both on and off campus. An informal dinner reception is held after the talk, where students mingle with faculty and the diverse group of attendees. Finally, each academic quarter DASA students attend a mandatory, yet somewhat informal, 90-minute “Director’s Meeting.” Here, students can voice their concerns, and the Director can remind them of upcoming deadlines and various events that may be of interest to them. The primary purpose of the meeting is to touch base with the students and take their pulse regarding their academic progress, what is working program-wise for them and what is not, and what is expected of them during the upcoming quarter. The Directors, as best they can, try to stay well connected to the DASA students.

(3) *Professional conferences.* The DASA budget allows some monetary support for student travel to the annual meeting of the Population Association of America (PAA) each spring. Although DASA cannot fully support travel to this conference for all students, each student attending the conference is normally provided \$500-\$600 to use toward his or her travel expenses. Attendance at the PAA conference provides an invaluable experience where students learn from hearing talks from esteemed demographers while at the same time networking with various professionals and fellow demographers to-be. Finally, DASA students attend the Annual USC/SCAG (Southern California Association of Governments) Demographic Workshop, held in early spring on the campus of the University of Southern California. This is a one-day event provides an excellent introduction to the use of Census data in demographic research. At this year's (2010) event, for example, workshop panelists will provide attendees with the recent updates on the 2010 Census. In addition, topics will include California's population and the 2010 Census, the link between the current recession and demographic processes, and new findings in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

c. Placement

(i) Table 5, attached, lists the DASA graduates since the last review, by cohort. It should be noted that the job placement information in the Table 5 is incomplete. Unfortunately, because DASA has no dedicated clerical staff, it is impossible to maintain detailed records on the its graduates' current employment statuses and job histories. Complicating this task is the nature of the DASA program itself – because it is a professional program, students are more likely to change jobs than graduates of academic programs who enjoy relatively stable employment in academic settings. This, naturally, also makes the job placement data even less reliable for DASA cohorts who graduated some time ago. That said, the information regarding job placement reflects the most current information available.

(ii) All evidence suggests that DASA students are quite successful in both finding employment commensurate with their skills and entering graduate programs. The DASA degree has proven to be a extremely valuable and marketable asset for those who have completed the program.

### **SECTION 3: STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

1. DASA is a unique interdisciplinary program that provides top-notch training in applied demography and has demonstrated effectiveness for preparing students to hold an array of jobs in diverse industries and settings. Its short, one year time commitment gives the program wide appeal, and despite fee increases, makes the program relatively affordable, especially for California residents. The program enjoys significant buy-in from faculty from a large number of departments in multiple Schools. Without additional resources, the program could be improved by an institutionalization of a more formalized recruitment system would increase the size and quality of the applicant pool, a precondition for the growth of the DASA program. Although additional funding would be extremely helpful in this regard, more could be done within current budgetary limits. Second, it would be prudent to give more attention to course scheduling, so that students are better able to take the elective courses that best suit their academic and professional goals. However, given that course scheduling is often subject to the vagaries of faculty members' preferences and constraints, there may be limits on what can be done.

2. Additional resources would be invaluable to DASA in the following areas:

- *Fellowship/TA Support for all DASA Students.* Presently, only a small percentage of DASA students receive support in the form of fellowships or TAs at the time they enter the program. This has obvious implications for recruitment, especially for excellent out-of-state students. Funding most, if not all, DASA students would have strong and immediate effects on recruitment and student quality.
- *Faculty FTEs.* New hires (whether they be in Social Sciences or Social Ecology) made with an eye toward DASA's educational mission are essential to the concentration's continued excellence and potential growth. Most immediately, this would allow DASA to offer a separate Graduate Statistics sequence and other DASA courses. It would also alleviate problems finding DASA faculty that can serve as mentors for incoming students. Although DASA faculty are very generous with their time and are generally extremely willing to serve as Advisors, many are overextended and cannot take on another student. The growth of the Sociology doctoral program has resulted in many faculty members mentoring multiple Sociology graduate students – both new students and continuing, advanced students. This year, matching the 14 DASA students to advisors was a challenge. It's not simply a numbers game – DASA students are carefully matched with advisors on the basis of their interests and the faculty member's areas of expertise, making it more complex than it might appear. The addition of new DASA-affiliated faculty would allow DASA to effectively increase its cohort size (assuming, of course, an applicant pool of sufficient quality).

If not full-time faculty, additional funds for hiring lecturers would be useful, as they could teach DASA electives, and probably have more flexibility to offer course at non-conflicting times than regular faculty. Finally, professionals hired to teach one-time, specialized seminars would also help support DASA's mission. For example, short courses or seminars on statistical computing, specialized demographic techniques, or the use of complex data sets would effectively serve DASA's goals.

- *Clerical/Staff Support.* DASA's clerical/staff support is insufficient. Dedicated support is needed, especially if the program is to grow. Ideally, the support personnel would have adequate web-based skills to manage DASA's web site. Staff support would also go a long way toward improved recruitment, both directly and indirectly. By shifting some of the work required for recruiting to staff, the Directors would be freed up to do more work to recruit outstanding students. Staff could also do the important work of keeping records on DASA graduates, facilitating linkages between current and former students, and between former students and DASA. Staff would also permit DASA to better gauge student satisfaction and possible areas for program improvement.

3. No previous strategic plan has been submitted.

4. DASA affiliated faculty are among the top demographers/social scientists in their areas of expertise. As such, they are well aware of news trends and developments that shape the discipline. This awareness trickles down and manifests itself in new demography related courses and seminars. To cite one example, the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is

increasingly being used to analyze and display demographic data. Following suit, DASA affiliated faculty regularly offer courses in GIS, which are very popular among the DASA students. In fact, in this year's career panel, several DASA graduates attributed their success in the job market to the GIS training they received as part of the DASA program. The DASA Directors will continue to seek out the affiliated faculty's perspectives on emerging trends and cutting-edge developments in the field, and continue to ensure that they are translated into the professional training that DASA provides.