

## THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA DOCTORAL PROGRAM

DAVID MORGAN

University of Oklahoma, Emeritus

**The only Ph.D. program** in political science in Oklahoma celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. In 1951, Walter F. Scheffer, a newly arrived assistant professor, prepared the proposal to offer the doctoral degree at the University of Oklahoma. Five years later, the University conferred its first Ph.D. in political science. Over the past 20 or so years, the department has seen an average of four to five doctoral students finish the degree each year. Based on doctoral student placement and the placement rate for its graduates, the program at OU compares well with others from similar institutions.

For a surprisingly long period, the department enrolled around 50 doctoral students in any given year. Only about half of these were taking courses at any one time; the remainder were enrolled in dissertation hours. In the past few years, the average number has declined precipitously; for the fall 2001 semester, the department has only 32 doctoral enrollees. This decline, of course, reflects enrollment trends in doctoral work in political science around the country.

Until about five or six years ago, doctoral committees really piled on the course work for their charges, insisting on broad coverage of the

selected fields. Slowly the faculty began to recognize that our doctoral students were taking too long to finish. So, the department made a conscious decision to reduce the coursework burden. Now doctoral students must complete a minimum of 42 hours of substantive courses beyond the bachelors.

Additionally, each must complete a research tool from several options, including statistics and proficiency in one or more foreign languages. Neither the University nor the department has a minimum requirement for dissertation hours. In all, the average student in recent years has taken about six or seven years after the bachelor's degree to complete the doctorate.

Doctoral students at OU must take three fields of study from a total of six: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, public administration, public policy, and political theory. Over the years, about 60 percent of these doctoral graduates have specialized in American politics; perhaps another 25 percent have chosen public administration as their main field.

Currently, the department and its affiliated units have enough graduate assistantships to support about 24 doctoral students. Some dozen of these are teaching assistants; the others are research assistants. The number of assistantships has risen almost yearly, primarily because of the growing number of research positions. Almost all research posts reside with the department's affiliated units, including: the Institute of Public Affairs, the newly created School of International and Area Studies, the International Studies Center, the OU polling center plus the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. The Albert Center also awards one or two fellowships annually to doctoral students recruited from around the country who wish to specialize in the study of Congress and the legislative process. Because of declining enrollments in doctoral study, research units sometimes hire master's level students or those from departments other than political science.

Over the years, the OU doctoral program in political science has furnished newly minted Ph.D.s to some surprisingly good institutions. Beginning in the 1970s, we sent doctoral students to such places as the Universities of Kansas and Missouri, Iowa State, Texas A&M, and Oklahoma State. Some OU Ph.D.s also ended up with political science departments at the Universities of Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Connecticut along with Arizona State and Cleveland

State. Most of these better placed students were primarily Americanists, but the department had respectable placements for some public administration doctorates as well. To be sure, these placements were the exception. And, this was a time when institutions around the country were engaging in record hires. Still, for a department previously known mostly for its teaching, OU has done better than many might expect.

The primarily reason for OU's placement success, in my opinion, was the interest on the part of a few faculty to publish with their doctoral students. During my tenure of about a dozen years as the department's graduate advisor, I emphasized to prospective and newly enrolled doctoral students the importance of publishing while in graduate school. If the student hoped for a good academic job as an OU Ph.D., I said he or she had better demonstrate a capacity to publish. Ivy League products or even those from the Big 10 might peddle themselves primarily as the student of a certain distinguished mentor. But to be competitive, an OU grad needs to publish before going on the job market.

The OU program has maintained a solid record for placing its doctoral students. The latest departmental tabulation shows a placement rate of about 88 percent. Not surprisingly, a growing number of these grads are taking nonacademic positions. For the years 2000 and 2001, six of the ten doctoral graduates took jobs outside of academe.

In recent years, the job market for doctoral students in political science has weakened noticeably. This tendency certainly has become apparent at OU. In the coming years, this downward trend could reverse as the children of the baby boom move through the public schools and into higher education. Yet, given the increased propensity of colleges and universities to hire part-time faculty, we may see very little growth in tenure track academic positions in the future. In the meantime, doctoral programs in political science must make a greater effort than ever to find nonacademic jobs for their doctoral students. So far, OU has responded well to that trend.

