

Department of Statistics 2-4 Review

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The Department of Statistics reviewed its Ph.D. program in the fall of 2006. Both faculty and students contributed, and this report first outlines the major proposals approved by the faculty as a result of the 2-4 Review. Other minor topics are discussed briefly, after the presentation of the major proposals.

Proposal #1: The department will formalize the advising and mentoring relationships for 1st and 2nd-year students.

Discussion. The DGS will assign each 1st-year student an advisor, but students are welcome (and encouraged) to seek alternate advisors with similar interests. Advisors will report student progress to the DGS at the beginning of each semester. The dissertation advisor becomes the student advisor in the 3rd year and beyond. The DGS will archive progress report notes, as appropriate. At the end of each year, every Ph.D. candidate will be asked to submit a short “activity report” to the DGS outlining their research progress and plans.

Proposal #2: At the end of the academic year, we will offer a casual lunchtime workshop aimed at 2nd-year students, “What is a Prospectus and How Do I Write One?”

Discussion. This proposal appeared in another 2-4 report and addresses questions raised by the students about the requirements and expectations for the prospectus.

Proposal #3: The Blue Book currently states that “normally during the first two years, fourteen term courses in this and other departments are taken...” Although this does not need to be changed, we propose allowing students the option of working as Teaching Fellows during their 1st and 2nd years of study, with the completion of the required coursework delayed into the 3rd year of study.

Discussion. This proposal serves several purposes. First, we believe that some students would benefit from the experience of serving as a Teaching Fellow prior to taking their qualifying exams. For example, our Ph.D. students don’t enroll in Stat 541 or 542, and yet mastery of this material as required of a Teaching Fellow would put the student in a stronger position for the qualifying exams. Second, early satisfaction of part of the “teaching requirement” would help relieve some of the time pressures of the 3rd and 4th years which can impede the transition into research. Finally, we note that many of our courses only require TF-2 assignments; spreading the teaching over a longer period of time would help reduce the need for a graduate student to simultaneously complete two separate TF-2 assignments in one semester.

We note that shifting the teaching assignments between years would not change the student stipends in any year. They would not be paid extra for an assignment during the 1st or 2nd years, and would not receive a reduced stipend in their 3rd or 4th years when they have a correspondingly smaller TF obligation. Early teaching is an option, not a right or a requirement, and the arrangement would need to be satisfactory both to the student and to the department.

Many other topics were discussed and debated by students and faculty. Students were satisfied with the qualifying process. We discussed general dissatisfaction with the Speak test, and noted that changes are on the horizon. We also discussed various curriculum changes, but not major changes are needed at this time. However, this report concludes by summarizing those topics related to the 2-4 Review.

Topic #1: We will encourage earlier involvement of all members of the dissertation committee in the dissertation process, as deemed appropriate by the student and faculty advisor.

Discussion. Some students felt that guidance from other members of the dissertation committee would help in the latter stages of the dissertation. The faculty agreed that such involvement should be possible when desired by the student and the advisor.

Topic #2: We created a web page outlining typical courses of study for 1st-year M.A. and Ph.D. students.

Discussion. The students thought this would help 1st-year students prepare for their first semester at Yale, even before arriving on campus. Everyone agreed this was a great suggestion, and it has been done.

Topic #3: A student representative will help the faculty select seminar speakers, and will organize pre-seminar seminars.

Discussion. This proposal was implemented in the fall of 2006, and the pre-seminar seminars (sometimes with the involvement of the seminar speaker) have increased student participation in, and appreciation of, the formal department seminars.

Topic #4: Faculty will be invited to give casual seminars, particularly in January, to introduce 2nd-year students to their areas of research.

Discussion. Students felt this would make it easier for them to approach faculty members late in their 2nd-year about possible dissertation topics. We've already had our first such seminar, with Harry Zhou speaking about research on false discovery rates.

Respectfully submitted,

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