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It may surprise you to learn we now offer eight “certificates of advanced study” substantiating topical specialization within a regular degree program. These are not the stand-alone “mini-degree” certificates that midcareer students at Maxwell take to advance their careers. Rather, they represent niches of focused expertise and knowledge students acquire while pursuing their master’s or doctoral degrees. For example, a student pursuing an M.P.A. might have a particular interest in national security and counterterrorism; by concentrating on a specific list of elective coursework, he or she may earn not only an M.P.A. but, with it, the Certificate of Advanced Study in Security Studies.

Among the certificates we now offer, three respond to student interest in specific global regions: South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Others focus on substantive issues and reflect how truly complicated and diverse the world of public service has become. There are now certificates for information technology, conflict resolution, health-service management, nongovernmental agencies, and, as mentioned, security studies. Two additional certificate programs are currently under faculty development, one on post-conflict reconstruction and the other on international development.

The specialization of these certificates reflects both new student demand within the School and a changing world of public service. In earlier times, careers in public service meant careers in government. Students came for M.P.A.s and got jobs in federal, state, and local government; or their I.R. degree led directly to careers in the foreign service or other international organizations. Today, fewer professional degree students take jobs directly in government. Roughly a quarter enter private business, and many work as consultants to government. Nearly a third find opportunities with nonprofit and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the sorts of international NGOs that have become such a significant part of the public-service landscape.

This curricular evolution has been going on for more than a decade, and it is now fully evident in our academic programming. It begins with a faculty that understands the trends and develops curricula to serve them; the faculty knows a more-specific degree is more marketable. And it is voiced by students who arrive at Maxwell not just hoping to serve the public good, but knowing, in many cases, where they want to do public good and in what field (economic development in Africa, for example).

You will see this not only in our certificate programs, but also in the specialized degrees that we have recently introduced — such as the new master’s in public health (offered jointly with Upstate Medical University) or in public diplomacy (offered jointly with SU’s Newhouse School of Public Communications). The latter program, which teaches students how to communicate on an international scale on behalf of organizations and governments, is a good indication of just how eclectic the world of public service has become. Enrollment is up as well in most of the joint degree programs, such as the master’s degree in international relations and economics; this, too, is indicative of students’ specialized career goals.

There are two important things our alumni and other supporters should understand about this trend. First, it is natural and largely unavoidable; we are responding to real changes in the field. Second, they exist as additions to, not replacements for, our central mission. The core of any professional degree program at Maxwell remains the skills, broad intellectual grounding, and wisdom needed by all public leaders; the students of today benefit from the same fundamental Maxwell education you received if you earned a professional degree at Maxwell. The difference is that today’s students have recognized that they need to acquire additional knowledge and skills to cope with the complexities of a globalized world.

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