National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

SNSPA

Managerial plan

Director of the Council for the PhD Studies (CSUD) of IOSUD-SNSPA

2020-2024

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General Overview

SNSPA Doctoral School was established in 2000, with a first program in Political Studies. In the next ten years, new programs in Administrative Studies (2001), Communication Studies (2008), and Sociology (2008) have been opened. Recently, in 2019, a Management PhD program has been established. Currently, the Doctoral School enrolls students for all these 5 PhD programs, with 33 thesis supervisors, and about 250 enrolled students.

During the last 20 years, the doctoral school has faced many challenges, both internal and external, mostly related to the continuously changing legislation in higher education in Romania, and the generation gap within SNSPA, due to the historical context of the establishment of SNSPA as a higher education institution. Despite these challenges (and many others), the doctoral school has evolved and, throughout the years, established many international cooperation agreements, among which, the most recent one within CIVICA, "the European University of Social Sciences unites eight leading European higher education institutions in the social sciences, humanities, business management and public policy, with a total of 50,000 students and 10,000 faculty members". (https://www.civica.eu/who-we-are/about-civica).

The most important challenge that the Doctoral school is facing nowadays, which could prove to be both a threat and an opportunity, is related to the accelerated digitalization of the entire higher education system, due to the rapidly changing technology development and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the entire strategic plan of of the Doctoral School needs to be updated and re-structured. SNSPA will need to focus on building bridges both across programs and research fields, but also across generations and various types of technologies. This task must guide any future development of the university, and within it, of the Doctoral School.

The current structure of the SNSPA Doctoral school:

1. PhD program in Political Studies (15 PhD supervisors)
2. PhD program in Administrative Studies (3 PhD supervisors)
3. PhD program in Communication Studies (8 PhD supervisors)
4. PhD program in Sociology (3 PhD supervisors)
5. PhD program in Management (4 PhD supervisors)

Vision

The SNSPA PhD School aims at becoming a national leader in higher education, with impactful advanced education programs, capable of producing highly skilled graduates that will be successful in their field of knowledge, engaged in societal endeavors, and leaders in innovation, creativity, and world-changing activities.

Mission

In line with SNSPA mission, the Doctoral School aims at creating and disseminating research results with international relevance, preparing graduate programs for excellence, sharing knowledge and best practices to graduate students, preparing the next generation of researchers for using tools and methods that are yet to be created and optimized, in the context of the new developments in technology and the media.

Values

The values associated with the SNSPA Doctoral school are:

- Excellence

We continuously strive for improvement and aim at providing excellence in research, teaching, and collaboration with the students.

- Integrity

We act with honesty and demand total ethical conduct in graduate studies and research.

- Collaboration

We build great relationships among professors, students, communities, research institutions, partners, and the business sector.

- Inclusion

We encourage people of all ethnicity, gender, race, and nationality to become involved in our community.

Objectives

Objective 1. Institutional development and Human Resources

As a relatively new Doctoral School, our institution is continually developing, following the development strategy of the university. To this end, we have two aims: to consolidate the current programs, and to develop new ones. Some of the current PhD programs have the minimum number of PhD supervisors, and in some cases, they are all part of the seniors generation. Additionally, human resources are the best resource that an institution has, and a good policy for recruitment, motivation, and life-long learning opportunities should be key to the development of the Doctoral school. Therefore, we propose:

1. To encourage the new generation of researchers, especially in the fields that are vulnerable at this moment (Administrative Studies and Sociology), through supporting the young researchers with high potential to obtain their habilitation both financially (to conduct their research studies or to participate at events, such as conferences, colloquia, workshops, etc.) and professionally (by finding ways to help them with research assistants, expertise of senior colleagues in the field, etc.).

2. The development of new PhD programs is a long-term objective, as the Doctoral School currently runs programs in most of the fields for which the university developed bachelor and masters programs. In the near future, we aim at offering a PhD program in psychology. In the long term, we will adjust based on the university development in this area.

3. To develop and support a culture of collaboration among all members of the Doctoral school

4. To maintain senior professors over 65 years of age contracts, as they are valuable resources of the Doctoral school

5. To assure conditions of professional development of the non-academic staff of the Doctoral School

6. To constantly scout for new experience researchers, research assistants, non-academic staff that could assure a culture of quality and excellence

Objective 2. Digitalization

Digitalization as a key objective of the Doctoral School should be regarded in the context of the constant modernization of the teaching and learning activities, and supporting services. As a short-term strategy, we propose two goals: one the one hand, the digitalization of the administrative process, and in the other hand an upgrade of the infrastructure. We propose the following actions:

1. In terms of administrative activities, to upgrade the current students database, which currently runs on an older version of ORACLE platform, and adapting it to the recently adopted ECTS system.

2. To offer all students the possibility to defend all research reports, and their thesis online. During the last three months, we implemented this change, mainly through the WebEx platform, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the measure taken should be further improved and developed, not only for exceptional times, but also as a current practice. The same holds true for the classes offered this year in all PhD programs. In line with the university policy, classes offered at the PhD level, will be entirely held online, with the possibility to further adapt, as the COVID-19 situation evolves. We do not aim at transforming the PhD programs into online programs, but we should make sure that we are prepared for this possibility any time in the future.

3. To consolidate and develop the subscriptions to the international databases with academic literature, which are currently provided through the ANELIS system. We are open to looking into both professors and students needs, and develop the current system by adding new databases to our subscriptions, as well as ensuring people could make suggestions/ requests through the library interface for books acquisitions.

4. To constantly adapt to the new challenges brought about by the new technologies, by integrating them in all activity sectors of the Doctoral school: infrastructure, lectures, specific tools for research, platforms, research groups, etc.

Objective 3. Internationalization

Internationalization has been for decades now one of the engines of profound transformation of the academic space, throughout the world. Curricula, strategic plans, education policies in the European Union are currently interconnected and harmonized with each other. In this context, increasing the international visibility of a higher education institution is key to its own development and to building a sustainable future in research, innovation, and social responsibility. To obtain this goal, we propose the following actions:

1. To stimulate academic cooperation through bi- and multi-lateral agreements, either through institutional formal projects (such as CIVICA), through a tighter connection with institutions, such as Romanian-US Fulbright Commission, Konrad Adenauer Schtiftung, The French Cultural Institute, etc., or different international organizations, such as The World Bank, UNESCO, OECD, EUA, IAU, etc.

2. To encourage professors and PhD students to get involved in international research teams, either in various grants (such as COST Actions, Horizon 2020 grants), or in small teams developed at individual level.

3. To continue supporting the existent research centers in their activities, with a special focus on encouraging international joint research studies

4. To develop the institutional context and encourage PhD students to seek out international supervisors, in joint degree programs

5. To support and offer invited lecture of prestigious international academics, on key topics of the fields in which the Doctoral school offers academic programs

6. To support students by financing the research studies of the most motivated and successful ones, through an internal mini-grants competitions open exclusively to PhD students

7. To stimulate students' mobility, by financing participation in international conferences, summer schools, and training programs

8. To support and encourage both supervisors and PhD students to publish articles in journals highly visible at international level (with impact factors), books and chapters at prestigious international publishing houses

9.   To encourage professors to offer courses in English (or other foreign languages), in order to attract more international students

Objective 4. Quality assurance

A culture of quality is a complex process, a continuous challenge that could help develop institutions and programs. As part of the quality assurance process at the level of the university, quality assurance at the PhD level has three main components: quality of programs; quality of human resources; quality of the infrastructure. The first dimension is integrated in the general Quality assurance internal process of SNSPA, and in the very near future should be focused on preparing the first external evaluation of the Doctoral school (by ARACIS). The actions associated with this objective are:

1.   To create an internal Quality assurance committee at the level of the Doctoral school, that will be in charge with the annual evaluation of the programs: evaluation of supervisors, evaluation of all internal processes specific to each PhD program, evaluation by the students, peer-evaluation, and self-evaluation

2.   To prepare the external evaluation of the Doctoral school and its programs (by ARACIS, Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)

3.   To put in place specific annual evaluations of each supervisor: self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, evaluation by students, evaluation by the Council of the Doctoral School

4.   To create a recruitment strategy for both supervisors and best PhD candidates for all programs

5.   To create mechanisms that support both professors and students to have access to life-long-learning specific programs, in order to improve their skills and abilities in research;

6.   To create an internal Ethics committee at the PhD level, that will be in charge with evaluating all research designs of PhD thesis, in order to consolidate the ethics dimension of the academic research (following the Institutional Review Boards model)

7.   To stimulate a culture of quality, by finding key motivators for both supervisors and students to actively co-create and contribute to the PhD community development

Objective 5. Opportunities for students

PhD students are not only the main beneficiaries of the programs offered by the Doctoral school, but they represent at the same time a pool of recruitment for the future professors of SNSPA. For this reason, we support a culture of quality that creates the best context for early stage researchers to develop their research and academic aptitudes and skills. In this context, one important objective of the Doctoral school strategy should be focused on offering opportunities for development to all PhD students. To this aim, we propose:

1. To attract the best students in the research activities of research centers and individual senior researchers teams

2. To encourage students to publish and to participate in academic conferences

3. To involve students in all decisions taken at the PhD level, by including them in the management structures of the Doctoral School

4. To cultivate a culture of partnership between students and supervisors

5. To encourage students to give constant feed-back to their professors (including their supervisors)

6. To organize periodic PhD workshops in which students receive feedback on their work in progress

7. To find the best ways to support academic mobility of students

8. To maintain and cultivate relationships with alumni of the PhD school and track their professional development after finishing the PhD program

Summing Up: Looking *Back* to the Future

Any projection or strategy of development of an institution (and Doctoral schools are no exception to this) should look firstly into the past, before aiming at a better future. Therefore, a first step into a new direction of development is to evaluate the good and the bad of the past, in order to build on what has been successful and sustainable and to learn the lessons of the past failures or misfortunes. In this context, the main objectives for the 2020-2024 term are:

Objective 1. Institutional development and Human Resources strategies

Objective 2. Digitalization of programs, infrastructure, and support services

Objective 3. Internationalization of programs, research, and networks

Objective 4. Internal quality assurance of programs

Objective 5. Opportunities for students

As a general goal, we aim at continue all great projects developed within the SNSPA Doctoral school in the past 20 years, and develop new ones, looking far away into the future, anticipating social and economic changes, embracing challenges and opening to opportunities, opening alongside with both professors and students new paths that could make the Doctoral school of SNSPA one of the greatest research units in the country.