

URB Task Force Steering Committee
Support for Research in Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities at Western

Final Report
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Contents:

1. Background
2. Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities Research – The Western Context
3. Value and Recognition of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities Research at Western
4. Infrastructure to Support Research at Western
5. Funding and Other Resources for Research at Western
6. Conclusions

Appendices:

- 1 – Report of Working Group 1 (including updates to the Interim Report)
- 2 – Report of Working Group 2
- 3 – Report of Working Group 3

1. Background

The priorities of the Western University Strategic Plan are built upon a “shared ambition to seek always the betterment of the human condition” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, p. 4). This choice of words is both apt and profound. Indeed, the human condition is both acted upon and improved by “academic freedom,” “autonomy,” “accountability,” “diversity,” “integrity,” “openness,” and “social responsibility” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, pp. 19-20). For Western, this means “creating a culture that places a higher value on scholarship and innovation, one that strives more intently to increase the impact and productivity of our research and scholarly activities across and between the disciplines” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, p. 7). For this kind of culture to thrive there must be appropriate infrastructure and support. The Strategic Plan specifically recognizes this need in the commitment to

“...focus more attention and resources promoting and rewarding (1) excellence in scholarship and innovation; (2) knowledge creation; and (3) the translation and mobilization of that knowledge into languages and applications useful in the public realm.” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, p. 7)

The social sciences, arts, and humanities are central to Western’s vision and mission. Indeed, world-class researchers in these disciplines are found across the University in eight of Western’s Faculties. However, changes in both the internal and external contexts make it timely to examine how social science, arts, and humanities research is valued and supported at this institution. Thus, while the mission and vision of Western’s Strategic Plan is the foundation upon which this report is built, the

goal of this report is to reclaim the idea of creating a culture of scholarship and integrity in order to move from concept to action.

1.2 The value of social sciences, arts, and humanities research

There have been many eloquent statements about the value of the research of social scientists, artists and humanists. A recent example, the 2014 *Leiden Statement on The Role of The Social Sciences and Humanities in the Global Research Landscape*, was signed by the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities (of which Western is a member) and six other international research university networks. The Leiden Statement declares that:

“The social sciences [arts] and humanities are indispensable to understanding and addressing contemporary global challenges and to grasping emerging opportunities. *Every challenge the world faces has a human dimension, and no solution can be achieved without enlisting the support and efforts of individuals, communities and societies.* [These disciplines] cultivate knowledge about human expression, behaviour, and social life that is essential to understanding the human context of these challenges and crafting viable solutions to them. Because of the centrality of these disciplines to these issues, as well as their intrinsic value, it is *essential within the global research landscape to promote, nurture, and cultivate social science [artistic] and humanistic research.*” (emphasis added)
(<http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/leiden-statement.pdf>, p. 1)

Others have noted that,

“research [in these disciplines] teaches us about the world beyond the classroom, and beyond a job. Humanities scholars [for example] explore ethical issues, and discover how the past informs the present and the future. Researchers delve into the discourses that construct gender, race, and class. We learn to decode the images that surround us; to understand and use the language necessary to navigate a complex and rapidly shifting world” (Gretchen Busl, <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/oct/19/humanities-research-is-groundbreaking-life-changing-and-ignored>).

Furthermore, an examination of the top five universities ranked in the Leiden Ranking 2015 (<http://www.leidenranking.com/ranking/2015>) indicates that a strong social science, arts, and humanities sector is critical to the strong showing of those research-intensive institutions. Four of the five universities (MIT, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton) were also ranked in the top five in the areas of social sciences and humanities. MIT and Princeton had their highest ranks in this area, as does Western.

1.3 Task Force Steering Committee Directives

The Task Force Steering Committee was formed by the University Research Board at the request of the Vice-President (Research) in September 2015. The mission of the Committee was to examine the environment of social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western – both internal and external to the institution – and ultimately recommend strategies to better support success, growth, and leadership in research in these disciplines.

The Committee identified, and the URB approved, three main areas of focus. In consultation with the URB and the Associate Deans Research (ADRs), three working groups were constituted, one for each of the main objectives. Members of the Steering Committee acted as coordinators for the working groups, which included representation from all eight faculties linked to the social sciences, arts, and humanities. The main areas of focus for the respective working groups revolved around three broad questions:

1. How do external entities, including funding agencies and professional organizations, define leading edge scholarly activity in social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines?
 - a. What are their priorities now?
 - b. Where are they going in the next five years?

Working Group 1 members consulted directly with the major funding agencies in Ottawa and professional organizations to fully understand the external context. This was followed by an examination of how Western might best position its researchers to take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities.

2. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for and threats to social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western?
 - a. How do units at Western define leading edge scholarly activity?
 - b. How is research in the social sciences, arts, and humanities valued and measured at Western?
 - c. How is research in the social sciences, arts, and humanities valued and measured outside of Western?
 - d. In what ways are these values and measurements aligned with the external context?

Working Group 2 engaged in direct consultation with social science, arts and humanities scholars in faculties across campus in order to understand perceptions of the research environment at Western. Personal consultations (interviews, focus groups) with 152 researchers were complemented by an online survey completed by 347 colleagues. This represents a participation rate of 60% or more (the figure is approximate as it is difficult to determine the exact number of social science, arts, and humanities researchers on campus due to overlapping areas of interest in the Faculties). The findings of Working Group 2 are represented in each of the sections of this report.

In addition, a senior graduate student working group was assembled and conducted a focus group discussion that paralleled the personal consultations with faculty members. Their reports have been communicated directly to SGPS and are included here as part of the Working Group 2 material.

3. How is research in the social sciences, arts, and humanities supported at Western and how can this be improved?
 - a. Specifically, how can (i) administrative practices and processes, (ii) funding, and (iii) recognition be improved?
 - b. How can Western better communicate the results of leading edge scholarly activities in social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines?

- c. How can Western advocate for social sciences, arts, and humanities research more effectively?

Working Group 3 focused on understanding the process and pattern of research communication at Western, across campus and within faculties. This included a review of administrative practices and processes in Research Development Services and the Department of Communications and Public Affairs. Staff in individual Faculties with responsibility for promotion and celebration of research were consulted, as were individuals at other universities, to understand best practices here and elsewhere and how other universities deployed internal funding resources. Working Group 3 was also interested to understand how researchers promote and communicate their own work and how they can be encouraged and supported to do that more effectively.

This report is a summary of the input from all the Working Groups, and as such cannot present the full richness of detail that our Committee received. The summary reports from the Working Groups are attached to this document as appendices and we strongly encourage a careful reading of those documents. We have deliberately chosen to strike a constructive tone in this report, but we acknowledge that there are deep currents of discord within the social sciences, arts, and humanities community at Western, and the reader is directed to the consultation report in Appendix 2 to get a better sense of the mood of the community.

2. Social Science, Arts, and Humanities Research at Western – The Western Context

The *Leiden Statement* and recent “defense of” writings regarding the value of research in the social sciences, arts, and humanities are indicative of the broad perception that these areas are in crisis, even in research-intensive institutions. Our consultations with scholars across campus clearly demonstrate that this perception is felt at the local level within Western as well.

Our findings suggest a considerable sense of malaise and discontent among the majority of those consulted. The critical concerns are around the valuing of research within Western, the lack of suitable internal funding mechanisms, and limited research infrastructure support. These issues are addressed here and in subsequent sections.

The consultations revealed an impressive array of social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western, the vibrancy of which is overlooked by a model of research that is founded on assumptions about practices and success that are not necessarily aligned with the needs, traditions and goals of many of these disciplines. Such a model is, therefore, unable to recognize, support or communicate the value and impact of social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western. The pervasive feeling is that the university tends to support and celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of researchers according to a hierarchical system of values that recognizes and celebrates high-budget research that is tied to technological “innovation” and industry interests, and particular kinds of research output (e.g., numerous and often multiple-authored publications).

The great diversity in social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western reflects both the strength and authority of the University. A research-intensive university such as Western must make

the most of this diversity by leveraging resources, and ensuring the optimization of researchers' time and focus. Within the broad scope of research in these disciplines, there are some social sciences, arts, and humanities researchers who find Western's research climate to be supportive and who have been successful in securing internal and external funding. Even those who are successful within the prevailing model, however, note that the value ascribed to their work by the University pales in comparison to that given to big budget projects. Other social sciences, arts, and humanities researchers work within scholarly traditions that embrace different models of research and success. Some do not require large amounts of funding, such as is seen with Tri-Council monies, yet experience great difficulty finding sources for the smaller amounts of funding they do need. There are other people who do not require funding in order to undertake their research but do require other sorts of support. They are looking for, but not often finding, is institutional recognition that research 'value' is not synonymous with research funding.

If Western is truly to realize its aspirations to become a world-class, research-intensive institution, it is critical that it acknowledge, value, and support all types of researchers and their respective needs. Researchers within social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines typically work alone or in small collaborative groups, requiring time to but little to no funding to do their research. Researchers who work within this model report feeling pressure to satisfy metrics-based evaluative processes, which are inappropriate to fully capture the value and impact of their academic work. Furthermore, for social scientists, artists, and humanists who do not require large budgets, application for external grants (such as Tri-Council) is not an efficient use of time, since the 'return on investment' for these applications is very low (given the combination of low competition success rates and a low budget request – see Appendix 3), time and effort could be spent more effectively conducting research rather than seeking funds to do the same. In addition, the increased Tri-Council emphasis on team-based grants makes it more difficult for the solitary scholar to be successful. It is in the University's best interests to work creatively to find other ways to support this work.

Within the social sciences, arts, and humanities there is a strong tradition of research practice where researchers work alone to produce sole-authored publications, often in the form of books. This mode of research typically requires time-intensive analytic, writing, and publication processes that are often, though not exclusively, driven by a sole author. Social sciences, arts, and humanities researchers working explicitly from critical, social justice perspectives— indeed those who are seeking “always...the betterment of the human condition” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, p. 4), and who work collaboratively with community, regional, national and/or international partners to effect long term social change through incremental impacts, are particularly disadvantaged within this hierarchical model.

Mid-career researchers are often disenfranchised as they find their programs of research difficult to sustain given current internal funding conditions. For these researchers, ineligibility for internal research programs coupled with the absence of sufficient and appropriate institutional supports stifles research productivity and research and threatens the optimal use of Western's human capital and resources that are vital to making it a world-class, research-intensive institution.

The Faculties at Western that house the social sciences, arts, and humanities researchers are not only diverse in terms of the research they undertake, but also in terms of the resources that they can mobilize to support research at the Faculty level. In size alone, these eight Faculties range from the

University's largest to smallest Faculties. While the larger among these Faculties are able to mobilize some research support, smaller faculties (with associated smaller budgets) are much less able to do so. Music, Law and FIMS, for example, only recently joined forces to hire a joint research officer, while some Faculties on campus have at least one if not several such staff members. Effective support of all faculty members' research requires a combination of resources available at the local and central levels, with specific recognition of the relatively limited resources available in smaller faculties.

The University's recent decision to contribute \$5M from the 2016-17 budget to an endowed fund to support social science, arts, and humanities research is clearly a step in the right direction and one which must be recognized and applauded.

3. Value and Recognition of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities Research

Central to any discussion of research advocacy and communications is the notion of value. The very act of advocating and communicating presupposes that there is value to what is being communicated. But how and in what ways does Western value research, particularly in the social sciences, arts, and humanities? What standards are used in that valuation? How does valuation take account of the diversity of work going on at the University? Does the rhetoric of valuation match the practice?

The value of research is expressed at a variety of levels within the University. At one level, the value of research is indicated by how the institution chooses to deploy tangible internal resources such as funding and infrastructure. At another level, the value of research is indicated by what and how the University chooses to communicate to internal and external audiences. Finally, the value of research is assessed and expressed at the Faculty and Department levels related to promotion and tenure (P&T), communications, and Annual Performance Evaluation (APE).

Achieving Excellence on the World Stage recognizes the diversity of research at this institution:

“... research outcomes and their dissemination ... mean different things to different people—from citations in the most prestigious disciplinary journals, to monographs and books published by leading presses; from keynote speaking engagements at national and international conference plenary sessions, to musical performances on the world's international stages; from scholarship that shapes public policy, to business cases that inform entrepreneurial decision-making; or from curiosity-driven enquiry, to scientific and technological innovations that can be commercialized for application in health care and by private industry.” (*Achieving Excellence*, 2014, p. 8)

The value of research is often discussed in terms of *impact*. How to measure that impact is a wide-ranging and ongoing discussion that we cannot completely capture here. Interestingly, the potential impact of the diversity of research outcomes and their dissemination through a wide range of mechanisms is generally not acknowledged within the University and its faculties and departments. This is in spite of the fact that the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences has published a working paper entitled *Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts Research: A framework for identifying impact and indicators* (<http://www.ideas-idees.ca/sites/default/files/2014-05-05-impact-project->

[update-en.pdf](#)) identifying five categories that can be used to characterize the impact of this research: (1) impact on scholarship, (2) impact on capacity (through teaching and mentoring), (3) impact on the economy, (4) impact on society and culture, and (5) impact on practice and policy. Each of these several subcategories goes far beyond the simplistic assessment of impact by means of the size of grants, citation counts and journal impact factors. Our consultations clearly indicate that social science, arts, and humanities researchers at Western feel that the University does not recognize these other areas where their research has impact. There is substantial concern among some scholars that simplistic metrics/indicators such as citation counts could become externally-mandated standards for faculty assessments (such as Annual Performance Evaluation, and Promotion and Tenure adjudications). While some schools and departments may find metrics to be appropriate for evaluative purposes, researchers remain adamant that the evaluative use of metrics *must not* be imposed on all units as *the* method of assessing faculty or individual researcher performance. The SSHRC ADRs submitted a document to the AVPR in February of 2016 that outlines the complexity of this issue within the social science, arts, and humanities disciplines. That document offers a summary of the kinds of metrics and other assistance that would help researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to document research impact and excellence. It is attached as part of Appendix 2.

The value and impact of research are also considered at the Faculty and departmental level through the P&T and APE processes. While these processes are supposed to be based on disciplinary norms, they do not recognize many of the aspects of the research of social scientists, artists and humanists. This includes the longer timeline for community-engaged research (given the need to first develop strong community relationships), and many aspects of knowledge mobilization such as reports generated for research partners that do not appear in peer-reviewed journals, and public engagement (e.g. media, public lectures etc.). If Western is to support its researchers in their efforts to align themselves with Western's strategic priorities as well as those of the Tri-Councils, it must find a way to recognize these additional activities (see Appendices 1 and 2).

An examination of advocacy strategies being deployed by the Tri-Councils clearly demonstrates that knowledge mobilization in all its forms is the key to having impact on the academy and society at large. In particular, the term "engaged research," with myriad modifiers (patient-engaged, community-engaged, public-engaged) is replacing the idea of "outreach," as it emphasizes the bi- (or multi) directional flow of information that increasingly characterizes engaged research, particularly that done in the social sciences, arts, and humanities. However, such engaged research faces a number of requirements, including the need for extensive lead time and consultation before research can even begin, negotiations with partner communities and other Universities that have their own research protocols that may or may not dovetail with those of Western, and outcomes that may not fit traditional academic models of impact. The training of graduate students in this area is also of particular importance. The outcomes of such engaged research surely bring Western closer to truth (*Veritas*). However, immediate usefulness (*Utilitas*) may not be as apparent nor may it fit neatly into the "typically defined... research groups" (Strategic Research Plan Summary, p. 1)

The communication of research results in venues beyond the usual scholarly publications and academic conferences serves many purposes beyond satisfying external granting agencies. It is a way to recognize success and offer public congratulations for a research achievement. It is a way to boost a researcher's profile (whether faculty members or graduate students), which in turn may bring new

and different opportunities for research and engagement. It is a way for the institution to demonstrate the breadth and quality of its research work to prospective students, faculty members, and donors, to governments, and to the private sector. It is a way to build a campus community, with researchers in seemingly disparate disciplines being made aware of the research taking place throughout the eight Faculties. Effective communication of research successes is also a means of publicly acknowledging the support of the Tri-Councils and of reinforcing to them the value of the research they fund. In all of these ways, the communication process serves to validate the scholarship of each researcher.

Western uses a number of tools as part of its broader communication and public relations strategy. These activities are coordinated by the Office of Communications & Public Affairs (hereafter CPA), under Associate Vice-President Communications Helen Connell. This office includes Alumni & Development Communications, Media & Community Relations, Creative Services, and Editorial Services. Many faculties have their own communications officers/teams. Further details regarding the research communications environment are outlined in Appendix 3. Our consultations revealed a strong and consistent sense among social sciences, arts, and humanities researchers that their work is not adequately publicized by the University, and that the publicity spotlight shines much more frequently on research in the STEM areas. Indeed, more than 80% of Working Group 2's online survey respondents indicated that social sciences, arts, and humanities research deserves both better recognition by the University and better promotion to improve visibility outside of the University (see Appendix 2).

A tabulation of "mentions" of research activity across the various public communication platforms at Western over the past five to seven years show some broad trends (see Appendix 3). Our analysis reveals that a research achievement in the STEM disciplines is four to five times more likely to receive institutional publicity than an achievement in the social sciences, arts or humanities disciplines. We do not mean to suggest that this disparity is intentional, and it must be stressed that the relatively poor promotion of social sciences, arts, and humanities research is not for lack of trying by CPA. Over a period of years, CPA has developed several initiatives to engage with scholars in these disciplines and begin conversations that could lead to greater publicity, with very limited success. Our findings suggest that this pattern appears to be the result of several phenomena: (1) the challenge of the CPA gaining access to information about social science, arts, and humanities research, (2) considerable differences in the support for communications among the various faculties (it is typically better supported in the STEM faculties than in social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines), and (3) a reluctance on the part of many social scientists, artists and humanists to engage with the communications team(s).

3.1 Recommendations

Western should:

- initiate broad discussion within the University about how research is valued and impact assessed at the level of the institution. The VPR's office initiated a discussion on this issue, and the SSHRC social science, arts, and humanities ADRs responded with a statement on indicators, but more discussion is needed, particularly in terms of how the University can be an advocate for its researchers
- engage in a new and critical discussion of contributions and impacts that are considered in promotion and tenure, Annual Performance Evaluation and graduate student assessment files.

It is clear that the external context is shifting in terms of contributions that the Tri-Councils value, so Western should respond to support its researchers

- establish better mechanisms to connect the Communications & Public Affairs office with the Faculties and social science, arts, and humanities researchers

For this process to be effective, researchers themselves need to recognize the value of advocacy / knowledge mobilization / public engagement / dissemination to their own work, and become partners with communications professionals across campus in publicizing their research achievements.

4. Infrastructure to Support Research

In order to enhance research productivity and impact, it is critical that Western ensure social scientists, artists and humanists have the infrastructure support to develop research projects, prepare and submit research grants, conduct research, and initiate the “reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users” (SSHRC, 2016 <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#km-mc>).

Based on the findings of the Working Groups (see all Appendices) our Committee identified four areas in which infrastructure should be strengthened to enhance social sciences, arts, and humanities research.

4.1 Support for the preparation of research proposals

Supports for faculty members applying for grant funding include: the identification of grant opportunities, application review, assistance with budgeting, identification of knowledge mobilization activities and development of knowledge mobilization plans. As discussed in Section 2 (above), some Faculties have the resources to provide some assistance to researchers in these areas, but access is not universal. Consultants in RDS are available to help with large grant applications, but their capacity to support more basic applications is very limited. Access to these and other relevant support services will enable researchers to prepare stronger grant applications and efficiencies would be gained if some supports were centralized, since this would promote coordination, avoid duplication and ensure access.

Researchers in the social sciences, arts, and humanities, in formulating their research programs from the outset would benefit from assistance in developing coordinated knowledge mobilization programs that include traditional modes of mobilization but also mechanisms such as research narratives, media releases, and community outreach. Research and Development Services, Western Libraries (e.g. Scholarship@Western), the Community Engaged Learning group and Communications Western would be key partners in this important initiative. In addition, knowledge mobilization plans will benefit from strong relationships with municipal, provincial and federal governments, policy makers, not-for-profit agencies, and other potential research users. Assistance with identifying, developing, and maintaining these relationships would help to strengthen both the awareness and the impact of social science, arts, and humanities research. In turn, this will enhance the competitiveness of our researchers in external grant applications by aligning them with the priorities of the external funding agencies.

To assist with budget development and justification, Western should develop a University-wide framework for the identification and valuation of institutional in-kind contributions. Increasingly, these types of contributions are required for external grant applications, and researchers need support to identify and document the in-kind contributions offered by the University. Two additional administrative areas were identified as being problematic: ROLA and the new HR regulations around hiring research assistants. ROLA is widely perceived by faculty members to be arcane and user-unfriendly. The ADRs have noted that ROLA is not useful as a means of tracking research application activity in their faculties.

Once a grant is awarded, faculty members highlighted that the new HR regulations surrounding the hiring of research assistants have significantly increased the workload of administrative staff, resulted in a longer hiring process and greatly increased the administrative burden on researchers, particularly those with large and complex grants. These regulations act as a particular disincentive to researchers with smaller grants, for whom the cumbersome hiring process may not be commensurate with the resources they have to devote to research assistants.

Given the highly competitive nature of external funding, social science, arts, and humanities scholars would benefit from access to an internal peer-review system. The system should provide timely and constructive feedback to enhance the quality of submitted research grants.

4.2 Research ethics review and approval

It is widely acknowledged that research involving human participants must reflect high ethical standards, and we recognize the importance and value of faculty and staff contributions to the research ethics process at Western. Nonetheless, in our consultations, many faculty and students expressed frustration with the University's ethics approval process, citing, in particular, Research Ethics Board comments that go beyond the accepted purview of ethics review and significant delays in procuring ethics approval. In addition, researchers involved in multi-university projects experience difficulties and delays in coordinating ethics approval across institutions.

Our Committee recognizes that the REB is aware of these challenges and is taking steps to address them. Documents detailing the steps taken to improve efficiency in the Office of Research Ethics are included as materials in Appendix 3. We support their efforts and encourage the University to ensure that they are given adequate resources, both in terms of finances and training of personnel, to promote timely review of submissions. Finally, if the REB is to reflect the ideal of local peer-review for ethical acceptability, social scientists, artists and humanists must dedicate their time to serving as members of the Board.

4.3 Access to research tools

Many research tools, such as quantitative analysis software that is commonly used in the sciences and in some of the social sciences, arts, and humanities, are centrally supported and are therefore widely available to students and faculty members at Western. There is not, however, comparable access to tools that would be of use particularly to social science, arts, and humanities researchers, such as qualitative analysis software and online survey software. Some Faculties are able to provide

to their researchers access to these resources, but others do not have the funds to make these tools available. Thus, coordinated centralized support for these resources would be of inestimable benefit to social science, arts, and humanities research on campus.

4.4 Fostering interdisciplinary and collaborative research

External funding agencies promote interdisciplinary projects that involve multiple researchers and students distributed across institutions, and participation in these large multisite grants is an important aspect of research practice. In our consultations, the Committee heard about the need for strong support for interdisciplinary and collaborative research. The development of fruitful collaborative relationships requires time and careful consultation; moreover, the outcomes of these collaborations will take diverse forms. Support for interdisciplinary and collaborative research projects must be structured in light of these facts.

Western's Strategic Plan clearly acknowledges the importance of interdisciplinary research:

“Recognizing that solutions to many of the world's most significant and complex challenges are often found where disciplines intersect, we will promote and support collaboration while building capacity for interdisciplinary research and teaching.” (p. 19)

This strategic focus is aligned with the Tri-Councils' increasing emphasis on interdisciplinarity. In keeping with this commitment, Western does provide some support for interdisciplinary research, particularly through the InterDisciplinary Initiative (IDI) program. However, there remain many barriers to conducting interdisciplinary research, and support for this kind of research should be broadened and enhanced. Barriers were reported by faculty members who have appointments in two or more units, particularly with regard to P&T and APE. Progress has been made in this area in the Collective Agreement, but apparently there is work yet to do. Supports could include both physical spaces on campus and events that promote conversations between disciplines and with partners outside of the University would be beneficial to the entire Western community. Creating venues and multiple ways in which the University can continue to encourage, facilitate, and support interdisciplinary research involving social scientist, artist, and humanist researchers and graduate students will strengthen the value of research across disciplines at the University level and beyond. Further, administrative support could be provided by people who are knowledgeable about community partnerships and international collaboration (such as the Community Engaged Learning group and Western International). Finally, the significant amount of time that goes into cultivating relationships in community based and interdisciplinary research—before grants can be applied for and research can be undertaken—should be recognized and valued (see Appendix 1 and 2).

4.5 Recommendations

Western should:

- Centralize some elements of grant support activities, such as the identification of granting opportunities, grant preparation support, peer review, determination of the nature and strategies for in-kind support, knowledge mobilization strategies and community engaged research facilitation and support
- Streamline basic administrative requirements and undertake a broad based review to increase efficiencies and decrease the load on the researcher
- Continue to support the search for improvements and efficiencies in the ethics approval process, noting the improvements that have taken place in the last year
 - expand the negotiated agreements with other institutions to allow ethics review to be delegated to a single institution.
 - encourage faculty members to become involved in REB committees
- Centralize support for key research tools, such as Qualtrics and NVivo
- Provide more support for interdisciplinary research
 - encourage the continued support for the IDI program
 - work for improvements in cross-unit appointments
 - create spaces that promote collaboration and cross-unit communication

5. Funding and Other Resources for Research

Western is to be applauded for the amount of central resources it invests in its internal funding program. Western contributes approximately \$2M/year in its internal funding programs, while some universities (e.g., McGill) only use funds made available from the Tri-Councils through the SSHRC Institutional Grant and SSHRC/NSERC Grant Residual Funds. Some universities have endowments that support internally-funded research (e.g., University of Toronto's sizable Connaught Fund, and University of Alberta's and University of British Columbia's Killam Funds) (see Appendix 3).

The diversity of interests and needs of social science, arts, and humanities researchers means that a "one size fits all" approach to the provision of support is inappropriate. We work within an external funding environment that stresses interdisciplinary projects and collaborative teams and partnerships. However, many scholars at Western and elsewhere work alone and/or require only small amounts of money to do their research. These scholars find themselves in a difficult position, since their projects and research needs do not fit the external funding model, and internal funding models have not been designed to fill the gap. Many researchers in the social sciences, arts, and humanities maintain an impressive research output without large grants, since their research costs are low relative to those seen in other disciplines, and they do not typically support labs or large numbers of graduate students. It is in the University's best interests to deploy internal funding programs that support the range of social sciences, arts, and humanities research. This would include support intended to enhance success in external grant applications as well as support for high-quality research that does not require larger-scale external funding.

To better understand existing supports for research, our Committee examined the internal funding environment for social sciences, arts, and humanities research. Prior to 2013, Western had a menu of

internal granting programs that included the Academic Development Fund (large and small), the SSHRC Internal Grants (research and travel), and the International Research Grant, among others. In 2013, the internal granting program was repackaged, with funds going to the social science, arts, and humanities faculties under the Faculty Research Development Fund (FRDF) and into the Tri-Council-specific Western Strategic Support for Success Funds (WSSS). This funding structure is still in place. With the FRDF, funds are deployed at the discretion of the Faculties, while the WSSS focuses exclusively on preparing researchers for the development of an application to the Tri-Councils.

Some perceived problems with this structure were uncovered by our Committee. The distribution of the FRDF funds was based on a formula (which has apparently not been recorded and cannot be reconstructed) that considered each Faculty's previous success in internal funding competitions and was thus heavily dependent on the size of the Faculty. Thus, some Faculties receive larger allocations, while others receive smaller allocations. With regard to the WSSS, the size of the grants (up to \$25k), their exclusive focus on the development of Tri-Council proposals, and the restrictive eligibility criteria for applicants (one must have held a SSHRC grant within two years or have recently received a 4A rating on a SSHRC application) means that larger amounts of money are concentrated among a smaller group of researchers. There is a widespread belief that the current internal funding program fails to recognize the breadth and variety of social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western, and that many researchers have been effectively shut out from internal support. This strategy may be consistent with the University's Strategic Plan, but it has had the consequence of eliminating support for many researchers, with a significant negative impact on faculty morale. In all, the changes have led to the perception of many researchers that they are unable to apply for internal support.

A focus of our Committee was to explore and identify concerns with the existing internal funding programs, but further consultation is required to determine specific means to address these issues. Thus, we recommend that the URB strike a subcommittee to oversee re-organization of the internal funding mechanisms. To aid the work of that subcommittee, we have identified a range of initiatives, based on our consultations at Western and a review of internal funding programs at other institutions that could enhance internal research support at Western. These are presented below in no particular order (see Appendices 2 and 3).

5.1 Existing Funding Programs

While emphasizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work across the social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines, there are some merits to the current internal funding model. In particular, the distribution of research funds to the Faculties through the FRDF program, while imperfect, has allowed for effective, focused local investments determined by Faculty priorities. In addition, something like the Strategic Support for Success program makes sense in better preparing our faculty members to be competitive at the Tri-Councils. However, beside the perceptions of inequities that are described above, there is some question as to whether these funds are actually achieving their stated aim. An analysis of the total value of SSHRC funds held at Western from 2011 to 2015, and an anecdotal accounting of the success at SSHRC application of WSSS recipients is presented in Appendix 3, suggesting that the WSSS program could be improved. At the very least, eligibility should be extended to collaborators or co-applicants on Tri-Council grants, those holding external

grants from agencies other than Tri-Council granting agencies, and those who have made recent Tri-Council applications where feedback indicates strategies that could feasibly lead to success on reapplication.

5.2 Possible New Forms of Internal Grants

An analysis of the internal funding programs at Western in light of our researchers' overall funding success at SSHRC revealed that the current strategic focus for Tri-Council success did not appear to be functioning as desired. Furthermore, a reflection back to the upward trajectory in funding from 2011 to 2013 suggests that a diversified, flexible and multilevel internal grants program actually permits more creativity and innovation and ultimately breeds more success than a program that assumes that one-size-fits-all. This is clearly the model followed by the leading international research-intensive universities (see Appendix 3).

To that end, a sequence of possible new forms of internal grants was developed from the input received as part of our consultation as well as the examination of internal granting programs at other universities (see Appendix 2 and 3).

Competitive Teaching Release

Lack of time was identified as a major barrier to research progress by many faculty members working in the social sciences, arts, and humanities. While this concern is no doubt also familiar to researchers from other disciplines, the form and demands of much social science, arts, and humanities research exacerbates the issue. Specifically, many of these researchers work alone, within a research model that is characterized by prolonged and intensive engagement with research materials, often involving work off-site. For these researchers, the most valuable research support – and the support that would offer the greatest impact in terms of enhanced research productivity – is relief from teaching in order to make meaningful gains in their work. Competitive internal grants that allow for teaching release would help to facilitate research momentum and productivity in social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Mid-career Research Awards

Mid-career researchers commonly observed that they are disadvantaged by the current internal funding mechanisms (e.g., seed, bridge, accelerator grants) that restrict eligibility to early career faculty or that tie eligibility to recent success in securing Tri-Council funding. Mid-career researchers who have not previously held Tri-Council funding and who wish to seek external support are constrained by restrictive eligibility requirements in their efforts to seek support for preparatory/pilot research, and are thus unlikely to be successful in preparing competitive grant proposals and in procuring external funding. They require internal support in order to develop competitive external funding applications. One proposal to support mid-career researchers in getting new projects off the ground is to offer a one-time “Kick Starter Grant” that would be available to researchers at a critical point in their careers, designed to help them build toward future external grant success.

Small Grants Program

Western University should actively support research that can be carried out on small budgets. Many of the participants in our consultations mourned the loss of the SSHRC Internal Grants and the Academic Development Funds, which were identified as valuable support programs for this type of low-budget research. Smaller grants should be made available to researchers in social sciences, arts, and humanities in the forms of small competitive grants (e.g. \$10,000 or less) and support for dissemination. The focus of these programs should be to support smaller budget research where there is no anticipation of external grant applications; instead, these projects should be considered on their own merit and with respect to the outcomes and impact they are anticipated to achieve.

Grants to support the preparation of large and complex proposals (e.g., Partnership Grants)

All three of the Tri-Council granting agencies stress multi-site and multi-investigator grants with an emphasis on interdisciplinary initiatives that include partnerships between academic institutions as well as community-academy partnerships. Researchers who work in these areas emphasize the significant time and effort involved in setting up these large-scale partnerships. Western should provide grants to support the preparation of these large-scale grants (e.g., SSHRC Partnership and Partnership Development Grants) in order to enhance success in these applications.

Research Grant In Lieu of Salary

As discussed in Appendix 3, our consultations revealed that many researchers frequently resort to self-funding their research or conference travel. A program (formerly known as the University Research Grant) does exist under which researchers can allot a portion of their salary as a research grant, allowing them to claim those expenses against their taxes. However, the language of the program is not clear, and a recent Canada Revenue Agency bulletin has been interpreted to mean that only sabbaticants can apply for this grant. There are some suggestions, however, that this interpretation is overly restrictive. If this is the case, the program is going unused by many of the researchers who could benefit from it.

5.3 Recommendations

Western should:

- re-examine its internal funding program to better understand whether current programs are achieving their goals, being cognizant of the variability in the kinds of support that researchers need. This could include:
 - revisiting the current FRDF and Strategic Support for Success Grants, doing an analysis of the effectiveness of these programs and the equity of the distribution of funds
 - broaden the existing internal funding program, considering new possibilities such as:
 - competitive teaching release grants
 - mid-career kick starter grants
 - small research grants
 - grants to support the preparation of large and complex proposals

- reviewing the URG and how it is being utilized as a means of making it more “user friendly” for faculty members who must, or choose, to self-fund. This may involve seeking a ruling from the CRA on the issue of whether non-sabbaticants can apply.

We feel that a diverse internal funding program will achieve two ends. The first is to support basic ongoing research and associated research outcomes in the social sciences, arts, and humanities. The second will be to better position our researchers to achieve success in their efforts to obtain external funds. Both these ends will be of benefit to the researchers themselves and to the University as a whole.

6. Conclusions

The strength in this report lies in the voices that are represented. Over that past year, we have spoken with multiple stakeholders. Conversations with representatives at the different Tri-Councils provided a frame of reference, as did dialogue with Western administrative staff, managers, and Deans. But above all it was the discussions and conversations with our colleagues and students in the social sciences, arts, and humanities faculties that were most formative to this report. At the heart of being valued is the simple act of being heard. This is not to deny the very real concerns and perceptions the researchers expressed: these are tangible and require immediate attention and action. It is to realize, however, that through conversations and discussions a deeply profound value can be co-created. One thing we have come to know is that there is a deep sense of care and pride for Western. Care should be the foundation for any ethical engagement and the processes of education and research is always that: ethical.

We trust the reader will find a detailed but also actionable set of recommendations within this report that would be of benefit not just to the social sciences, arts, and humanities, but to the entire Western community. This past year has revealed deep currents of frustration and disillusionment, but out of grievance a pathway forward is thus laid.

Respectfully submitted,

The URB Task Force Steering Committee – Support for Research in Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities at Western

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Alison Doherty	Health Sciences (Kinesiology)
Jonathan Vance	Social Science (History)
Charles Weijer	Arts & Humanities (Philosophy)