Western Research

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Response to the Report of the URB Task Force Steering Committee
Support for Research in Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities at Western

In the fall of 2015, I directed the University Research Board to establish a Task Force to assess strengths and weaknesses in how research and scholarship in the Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities are supported and valued at Western, and to ultimately recommend strategies for how to better promote and enhance research excellence, leadership, recognition, and success in these disciplines. The Task Force's final report was completed in May 2016, and is available at the following link. I subsequently established a representative working group, chaired by Associate Vice-President (Research), Juan Luis Suárez, to begin to address and implement some of the Task Force Report's recommendations.

The following highlights some of our progress to date and contains 1) A Summary of measures taken in response to the Report; 2) A full consideration of main points and recommendations included in the Report; and 3) Appendices.

Recommendations put forth in the Task Force Report constitute one component of an overall strategy to better serve the various missions and needs of the broader SSAH research community. In this context, my office has also implemented several important initiatives in the past two years beyond Task Force recommendations, some of which are also included here for completeness.

1) Summary of Measures

- Creation of a new Associate Vice-President (Research) position to support SSAH disciplines. Dr. Juan Luis Suárez was appointed to this role on July 1, 2017.
- Western established a $10M* Endowment Fund for research in the SSAH. This fund will make available $400,000 annually for the support of research activity in these areas by 2019.
- Appointment of a newly created Knowledge Exchange Manager role (Erin Huner).
- Internal funding mechanisms have been re-tooled through direct input and consultation with Associate Deans (Research) (ADRs), resulting in a set of opportunities that address, to the extent our resources allow, concerns expressed in the Report, and better embrace the culture and practice of these disciplines:
    - Western Strategic Support for SSHRC Success has been organized into two competitions to maximize flexibility to researchers' programs and types of research:
        - SSHRB Seed Research Grant; and
        - SSHRB Open Research Grant.
    - A new competition to seed New International Research Networks was launched in fall 2017.
- The allocation formula for the Faculty Research Development Fund (FRDF) to individual faculties remains unchanged after broad consultation and review by ADRs. We continue to ensure maximum flexibility to better serve all types of research and scholarship by maintaining faculty-level decision-making responsibility for the FRDF.
- Implementation of an enhanced communication strategy that includes increased coordination between Research Western and Communications & Public Affairs; hiring a Research Storyteller focused on stories about SSAH research; and organization of a Storyteller Bootcamp to provide researchers with tools and confidence to communicate their work externally.
- More consultation, more often with SSAH researchers. As part of this, Research Western undertook broad face-to-face consultations with more than 50 faculty members over a dozen sessions to gain a better understanding of issues and to improve services.
- Increased attention by the Associate Vice-Presidents (Research) to fostering collaboration among researchers in interdisciplinary settings.

- Engaged the ADR group to play a more strategic role in decisions. This group is now chaired by an ADR.
- Streamlined the ethics approval process and efficiency by deploying a new software platform (WREM) and hiring two new ethics officers.

  * The SSAH endowment fund will be augmented by an additional $2.5M in the upcoming budget year, bringing the total value of the endowment to $10M.

2) Full consideration of main points and recommendations included in the Report

The URB Report is organized into six sections (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; and 6. Conclusions) and three appendices, containing reports by each of the three Task Force working groups. The following addresses each section of the original Report.

Note: Paragraphs in *italics* are specific recommendations issued by the URB Task Force and paragraphs in blue detail specific measures taken to solve these issues. Paragraphs beginning with **R** indicate initiatives that are currently underway, but not yet completed.

Background:
The Report covers some of the most important principles of the research mission outlined in Western's strategic plan – *Achieving Excellence on the World Stage* – especially those for fostering a culture that places high value on scholarship and innovation, impact and productivity across disciplines. Moreover, it quotes the call on page seven of *Achieving Excellence* to focus more attention and resources on excellence in scholarship and innovation, knowledge creation, and translation of knowledge.

The Report places most of its emphasis on the availability of resources (or lack thereof) and differences in culture and practice around disciplines that make up eight of Western's 12 faculties and schools. The Report exposits the existence of deep currents of discord within social sciences, arts, and humanities communities at Western.

The committee was organized into three working groups that answered, respectively, the following questions: 1) How do external entities, including funding agencies and professional organizations, define leading-edge, scholarly activity in social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines? 2) What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for and threats to social sciences, arts, and humanities research at Western? 3) How is research in the social sciences, arts, and humanities supported at Western and how can this be improved? Results of the three working groups were compiled into the following sections:

Social Science, Arts, and Humanities Research at Western – The Western Context:
Externally, crisis of the SSAH;
Internally,
- Concerns about how research is valued within Western;
- Lack of suitable internal funding mechanisms; and
- Limited research infrastructure support[1].

According to the Report, Western's prevalent model of research values and celebrates:
- High-budget research, tied to technological innovation and industry interests; and
- Particular kinds of outputs (volume of publications and multi-authored publications).

Our proposals to mid-career researchers, who "are often disenfranchised as they find their programs of research difficult to sustain given current internal funding conditions," can be found under "Funding and Other Resources for Research."

Value and Recognition of Social Science, Arts, and Humanities Research
This section of the Report focuses on how Western values research by linking it to:
- Deployment of tangible internal resources (funding and infrastructure);
- Practices related to communication of research;
- How research is assessed in P&T and APE[2];
- Impact; and
- Knowledge mobilization.

The committee offers three recommendations and one comment about the importance of knowledge mobilization as an integral part of these disciplines:

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, and provide appropriate supporting tools to, its researchers.

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[1] These issues are not exclusive to Western, but a concern by many top researchers, like Jeffrey C. Hall in http://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(07)02369-X.

[2] Research Western is not involved in the assessment of P&T or APE files, although in P&T cases, the VPR's expertise can be asked upon in matters of research output.

Our response:
- ADR meetings have become the permanent forum for this issue.
- The Vice-President (Research)'s leadership team regularly attends faculty events, such as Faculty Council, faculty planning meetings, and meetings with ADRs to engage researchers about these issues.
- In June 2017, Research Western initiated a consultation process to more directly engage researchers in institutional strategic planning exercises, and to identify opportunities to align the university's activities with the community's needs. "*Stewarding Knowledge: Reviewing the Alignment of Research Western's Services through Consultation*" (see Appendix 1) represents feedback from more than 50 faculty members from each faculty over a dozen 90-minute consultations.
  - There are now clear expectations of excellence, productivity and innovation among most of our researchers, who are demanding equivalent levels of institutional support. Put bluntly, the community understands we are a research-intensive university, and the question now is what type of research-intensive university we are.

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.

Our response:
- We are happy to participate in a consultative role as required, but departments and faculty councils are the appropriate forum for this discussion in light of our collective agreement and details of our shared governance model.
- The new Associate Vice-President (Research) has engaged with faculties through ADRs to stress the importance put by external funding agencies and new provincial and federal government agencies on collaboration, interdisciplinarity, societal impact, knowledge mobilization and communication.
- As approved by the ADRs, we have embarked on a strategic exercise that, throughout 2017-2018, will solicit input from all members of the academic community to provide a comprehensive overview of research undertaken across campus. The resulting document will inform development of the next Strategic Research Plan. (Appendix 2).

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

Our response:
- We have initiated additional monthly meetings with Helen Connell (Associate Vice-President, Communications & Public Affairs) about possible stories, successes and priorities related to research in SSAH. These are in addition to established quarterly strategic meetings between Research Western and Communications & Public Affairs.
- In collaboration with Communications & Public Affairs, we conceived of, and introduced, a 'Storytelling Bootcamp' to provide hands-on training related to speaking with reporters, using social media, developing knowledge exchange plans, and shooting and editing video. Registration for the first session – held in October 2017 and designed to increase competencies and confidence among researchers – consisted of more than 90 per cent SSAH researchers.
- As a pilot initiative, Research Western hired a six-month contract 'Research Storyteller' dedicated to sourcing and crafting research stories for dissemination through various channels. This new hire began in November 2017 and has exclusively produced SSAH stories.
- Collaborative efforts between Research Western and Communications & Public Affairs to promote SSAH research also continue through promotion of events like the Indigenous

Mentorship Network Program, the Innovation Ambassadors launch, and announcements of various centres and initiatives.

- We will host an annual Awards Ceremony to recognize and celebrate achievements of researchers who have won prestigious awards and/or who have been recognized over the past year (by the Royal Society, CRC, etc.). The inaugural awards ceremony is provisionally scheduled for February 2018.

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.

Our response:
- Appointment of a newly created Knowledge Exchange Manager role (Erin Huner).
- Regular engagement by the Knowledge Exchange Manager with researchers through a variety of events, including a special session in Arts & Humanities in August 2017.
- Collaboration with Western Libraries to create and implement a campus-wide Strategic Plan for Knowledge Exchange.
- As noted above, the Research Storyteller role has been introduced to better engage with SSAH researchers and to identify stories for internal and external audiences. It is a six-month pilot we hope may evolve into a permanent position in the future.
- In early 2017, Research Western introduced a new Heritage Plaques program to celebrate historical research achievements in research at the university. Of the two plaques announced annually, one will be dedicated to research in SSAH disciplines

Infrastructure to Support Research

The Report emphasizes the link between increasing productivity and impact, and the existence of a solid infrastructure support for our researchers. It spells out the following areas of concern:

Support for the preparation of research proposals
Our response:
- The capacity of Research Development and Services teams is limited given high volumes; even so, over the past 18 months, we have supported the preparation of a record number of applications to ORF and other funding agencies.
- We lack a consistent practice of funding for preparation and support of large, multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary proposals, which often occurs in collaboration with faculties. We are developing a plan to produce a document each year, in the month of June, which will outline what type of financial support researchers can expect over the next fiscal year when putting together large, collaborative application grants.

Assistance in formulating and advancing research
Our response:
- We provide this service on an individual basis as a permanent activity in one-to-one meetings with researchers, and through coordination with ADRs, including, as examples: Centre for Francophone Literature in A&H, meetings with researchers in Health Science and Education, the Child & Youth Initiative in Education.

Administrative barriers: ROLA
Our response:
- Research Development & Services and Research Ethics (RDSE) identified four working group areas in May 2017, following consultation with WISG and detailed interviews completed by Karen Chelladurai. Upon further discussion, a fifth area has also been identified.
  - o Certifications and Risk;

- o ROLA Changes;
- o Reporting;
- o Procedural/Documentation; and
- o PI Research Eligibility – Grants integration with HR.
- As of October 4, 2017, there is no firm timeline for implementation as WTS is at full capacity and tending to other projects. They have assured us work to be done with RDSE remains a priority.

Administrative barriers: HR regulations around hiring research assistants
Our response:
- During the first term of 2018, we will engage in conversations with HR to study possible ways of increasing efficiency and limiting frictions, while complying with our institutional obligations in this area.

Research ethics and approval
- See below.

Access to research tools
- See below.

Fostering interdisciplinary and collaborative research
- We have established more than 50 new collaborations over the past two years through legwork by the AVPRs and ADRs to make one-by-one connections. This is a very high priority for both AVPRs.
- We expect programming associated with the Innovation Ambassadors (Western Entrepreneurship) will contribute to the discovery of new synergies and collaborations.
- The strategic planning exercise to compile areas of research expertise will uncover new areas of possible collaboration.

Specific recommendations made in the Report include:

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.

Our response:
Most of these elements are already centralized, as:

- *The identification of granting opportunities.*
  - o These are identified on Research Western's website and in monthly emails to ADRs containing research opportunities for distribution among researchers.
  - o We can analyse the website's design and user experience and formulate a strategy for the (broad and targeted) dissemination of granting opportunities around communicating timelines to researchers.

- *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.*
  - o These are available through the Research Development team for both standard and large external funding opportunities.
  - o These are available through the Research Services team for standard external funding

opportunities, and for additional support for U.S. federally funded programs.

- o In many cases, the peer-review process is taken on by individual members of the Research Development team and the AVPRs.
- o Every year in August, publish and distribute among ADRs a sheet describing strategies for in-kind and cash support for the upcoming year's competitions.

- *Streamline basic administrative requirements and undertake a broad-based review to increase efficiencies and decrease the load on the researcher.*
  - o Once the position is filled, this will be a key accountability for the new Executive Director of RDSE.
  - o It is clear, however, that increasing requirements for accountability and transparency from funders will augment existing administrative burden on PIs.

- *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.*
  - o In September 2017, the Office of Human Research Ethics implemented a new mission-critical software platform (Western REM/WREM) to streamline business processes and improve information management and reporting capabilities.
  - o We have identified and documented new sets of roles and responsibilities, hired two new staff members and trained staff to properly fill identified positions.
  - o We have developed and implemented Standard Operating Procedures, updated all existing guidance documents and templates and published new ones – all to modern standards.
  - o We estimate service delivery wait times have been reduced by 25 per cent and commit to providing annual reports on service quality (as this is now possible with the new support infrastructure).

- *Expand the negotiated agreements with other institutions to allow ethics review to be delegated to a single institution.*
  - o We established a successful coordinated review process with the University of Waterloo two years ago.
  - o We continue to engage in conversations with Universities of Toronto and Ottawa to institute a similar process.
  - o We are part of the South Western Academic Hospital Network.
  - o Western functions as the Board of Record for Child & Parent Resources Institute, Thames Valley Children Centre, and Vanier Children Services.

- *Encourage faculty members to become involved in REB committees.*
  - o The REB, together with the Dean's office for the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, has introduced a project that assigns debits/credits to researchers based on their contributions to, and use of, the human research ethics boards. In this system, the REB reports to individual department Chairs/Deans on the number of submissions received by the REB per department and whom from each department is attending REB meetings and contributing to the review of submitted protocols. In turn, departmental Chairs will establish a fair solution that provides the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (HSREB) sufficient REB membership to handle workload, help maintain the HSREB as a scientifically valid Board and remain compliant with regulations set forth by federal and provincial governing bodies. It is up to individual Chairs, working with the Dean's office,

to orchestrate this activity within their own departments (including recognition of academic contribution and time availability). We will evaluate this program once it has been running for six months and will assess the viability of extending it to other faculties, where there is interest from the dean.

- o A noted delay in the review process is seen during initial review. REB members can take upwards of three weeks to initially review a submission, or the REB may have insufficient REB representation. A delay is, therefore, seen when finding a reviewer. We will have more precise data to assess this issue once the WREM system has been in place for six months. We acknowledge departments should properly credit their members for this work.

- ▪ *Centralize support for key research tools, such as Qualtrics and NVivo.*
  - o Through communication with WTS, and a survey to faculty research administrators, we have created an inventory of available software research tools on campus (Appendix 3).
  - o The report recommends offering centralized access to Qualtrics and NVivo.
    - According to WTS, a large number of faculties and units already use it; the price is $3,000/unit.
    - The price for an educational license of NVivo is US$540.
    - We recommend forwarding a special request to the VPR, via the corresponding ADR, in cases where faculties are unable to provide funds for licenses as it is impossible to provide limited-use licenses.
  - o We also recommend the adoption of open-source alternatives whenever possible.

- ▪ *Provide more support for inter-disciplinary research.*
  - o *Encourage the continued support for the IDI program.*
  - o This is already central of Research Western's leadership team's continued advocacy efforts, although the program is administered by the Provost's Office.

  - o *Work for improvements in cross-unit appointments.*
  - o Not applicable to Research Western.

  - o *Create spaces that promote collaboration and cross-unit communication.*
  - o **R**: With the Libraries, Knowledge Translation.
  - o **R**: Design an innovative, multi-disciplinary strategy for SSAH as part of the Knowledge Exchange portfolio.
  - o In collaboration with the Western Entrepreneurship initiative:
    - Provide innovation courses for graduate students in a multi-disciplinary setting.
    - Propose faculties incorporate spaces for collaboration and innovation into their building designs, as per discussions and recommendations proposed during the Innovation Ambassadors launch event.

Funding and Other Resources for Research
The Report praises the financial support to internal funding programs (around $2M) and stresses the need for a funding strategy that addresses the variety of types of research at Western – that is, a funding strategy for internal programs that remains flexible to tackle different needs at different moments of a researcher's career. Some problems with the internal programs included:

- Lack of transparency of formulae used for distribution of FRDF funds.
- The structure of the WSSS is questioned on the following aspects:
  - Size of grants;
  - Focus on development of Tri-Council proposals; and
  - Restrictive eligibility criteria for applicants (SSHRC grant within two years of recent 4A rating on SSHRC).
- The Report also suggests new forms of Internal grants, specifically competitive teaching release, mid-career research awards, a small grants program ($10,000 or less), grants to support preparation of large proposals, and research grants in lieu of salary.

Our response:
- Western has established a $10M Endowment Fund for Research in the SSAH, which will eventually make available $400,000 annually for research in these areas. For the current year, $200,000 was allocated directly to faculties through the FRDF, with the remainder retained centrally for strategic SSAH-related initiatives, support for larger external proposals, and for other strategic SSAH-related purposes, including promoting interdisciplinarity, equity and diversity, etc. We will revisit strategies on how best to use the endowment funds next year.
- Internal funding mechanisms have been revised through direct input and consultation with ADRs, resulting in a set of opportunities that collectively address, to the extent of that our resources allow, many concerns expressed in the Report:
  - Western Strategic Support for SSHRC Success has been organized into two competitions to maximize flexibility to researchers' programs and types of research:
    - SSHRB Seed Research Grant; and
    - SSHRB Open Research Grant
- We launched a new competition to seed New International Research Networks in fall, 2017.

The recommendations are to:
- *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 (WSS) Grants, doing an analysis of the effectiveness of these programs and the equity of the distribution of funds.*

Our Response:
- The formula for distributing the FRDF was reviewed and examined by a task force set up by the ADRs. Their recommendation was to keep the current allocation formula as is and to maintain control of the FRDF at the faculty level. As in the past, the FRDF allocation is expected to be used strategically by faculties to directly address issues of distinctive disciplinary "practice and culture" that have been articulated in the Task Force Report (see below).
- As described above, the FRDF has been supplemented by $200K from the Endowment Fund for the SSAH for the current year. This decision was taken on the strong advice of the ADRs.
- We developed a better reporting system within RDSE to help track researchers' external successes and connect this record to internal funding programs. There was agreement among ADRs for the WSS to serve as a collective method of allocating resources to those researchers trying to extend their research programs through external funding.

- *Broaden the existing internal funding program, considering new possibilities such as:*
  - *Competitive teaching release grants;*

- o *Mid-career kick starter grants;*
- o *Small research grants; and*
- o *Grants to support the preparation of large and complex proposals.*

Our Response:
- ▪ The FRDF, supplemented by additional resources from the SSAH Endowment Fund this year, provides a possible source of support for these ideas and to enable faculties themselves can make decisions that best suit them.
- ▪ The first round of the newly created New International Research Networks has been adjudicated (Appendix 4).
- ▪ We will be relaunching the Distinguished International Visiting Researchers initiative.
- ▪ We are developing a strategy to recruit outstanding postdoctoral scholars across all disciplines.

- ▪ *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.*

Our Response:
- ▪ Not applicable to Research Western.

Conclusions

Research and scholarship in social sciences, arts and humanities-aligned disciplines is foundational to Western's vision and mission as a comprehensive, globally recognized and research-intensive university. The foregoing is a brief summary of just some of the steps we have taken to help ensure that these disciplines remain vibrant and strong. We are committed to continuous improvements in how to best to support and promote the breadth and diversity of the critically important research we undertake in SSAH. We will continue the collaboration with our stakeholders, and welcome ongoing input from our community.