

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

### Initial Report

#### A. Membership

The Task Force Steering Committee was formed by the University Research Board at the request of the Vice-President (Research) to examine how researchers in Social Science, Arts, and Humanities disciplines are supported at Western. URB appointed the following individuals as a steering committee to guide the work:

Andrew Nelson (Chair)	ADR, Social Science (Anthropology)
Cathy Benedict	Director of Research, Music
Jacquie Burkell	ADR, FIMS
Alison Doherty	Health Sciences (Kinesiology)
Jonathan Vance	Social Science (History)
Charles Weijer	Arts & Humanities (Philosophy)

#### B. Mission & Objectives

The committee has met three times over the summer to discuss the mission and objectives of the review and to develop a work plan for moving forward, for which we are seeking URB's approval.

##### *Mission*

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 and Schools. Changes in both the internal and external contexts make it timely to examine how social science, arts, and humanities research is valued and funded. The Task Force will recommend strategies and concrete action plans that will better support success, growth and leadership in research in these disciplines at Western.

##### *Objectives & Work Plan*

The committee has identified three main areas to examine and, in consultation with URB and the ADRs, will constitute three working groups, one for each of the main objectives. Each working group will include at least one member from each of the eight Faculties in which social science, arts, and humanities research is conducted. Members of the steering committee have been assigned to act as coordinators for the working groups. Those coordinators have begun to design work plans that will be discussed in more detail at the URB meeting on September 8. A brief outline of each follows.

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?

Andrew Nelson and Charles Weijer will coordinate the work in this area. As a first step, they will be consulting directly with the major funding agencies in Ottawa and professional organizations to fully understand the external context. Once that consultation is completed, the group will examine where Western fits currently and how it might best position itself for the future.

2. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities of 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?

Jacquie Burkell, Cathy Benedict and Charles Weijer will coordinate the work of this group. They will conduct a document review, and, in consultation with the ADRs, develop a list of individuals and groups with which to meet within each Faculty/School, recognizing that each unit deals with research issues differently. They have begun to develop a series of questions that may be put to individual researchers and groups and are considering whether to conduct a common survey of all researchers in the social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines at Western. They will also take part in a town hall to be held later in the fall to which all researchers in the related disciplines will be invited.

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?

Jonathan Vance and Andrew Nelson will coordinate the work of this group. The individuals to be consulted across campus will vary depending on the question. For example, a review of administrative practices and processes will require targeted consultations with those in Research Development Services who do the work that supports those processes; understanding communication and promotion of research activity will require consultation with the Department of Communications and Public Affairs, staff in individual Faculties with responsibility for promotion and celebration of research, and individuals at other universities to understand best practices here and elsewhere. The group will also want to understand how researchers promote and communicate their own work and how they can be encouraged to do that more effectively. With respect to examining the various internal funding programs, discussion with the full research community via the town hall would be appropriate.

### C. Communications and Outreach

The information gathering strategy adopted by this taskforce includes the targeted communications and outreach described above, and a single town hall event for all interested researchers to attend. The current plan is to hold that meeting in early to mid-October. Discussions for other means of gathering input are still under way.

A web page - [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/about/gov\\_review/urb\\_index.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/about/gov_review/urb_index.html) - has been set up for the Task Force that will provide updates from time to time on the work of the committee, scheduled meetings, questions for comment, etc.

Once the URB has approved the mission, objectives and work plan for the task force, a broad communication will be sent to all researchers about the task force's work with an invitation for input. A dedicated email address ([urb-task-force@uwo.ca](mailto:urb-task-force@uwo.ca)) has been established for the task force to which individuals or groups can provide comments.

An interim report will be provided to the VPR by mid-January for presentation to the URB at their meeting in February. A final report will be presented in early April.