

July 7, 2016

***RE: URB Task Force on Research in Social Science, Arts and Humanities at Western***

Dear colleagues,

Last month, Anthropology professor Andrew Nelson presented to Senate the University Research Board's Task Force report on how Western might better support research and scholarship in the social sciences, arts and humanities. The 16-page report and its detailed appendices were also shared with the Board of Governors at its meeting June 23.

The report reflects input gathered over eight months from some 500 faculty and senior graduate students, representing about 60% of Western scholars whose work aligns within these three broad disciplinary areas.

As the VP responsible for striking the Task Force last fall, I'm grateful to Professor Nelson, our colleagues on the committee, and all those members of campus who shared their perspectives on this timely and important topic. Your work and feedback has produced a number of helpful suggestions for strengthening Western's research and scholarship culture.

Although some recommendations (such as those concerning changes to internal funding mechanisms) can be implemented expeditiously, other recommendations concerning matters such as workload, promotion and tenure, and how research value is assessed will require broader consultation. To that end, a working group is being struck over the summer to begin the process.

However, I want to take this opportunity to comment on a few observations and conclusions drawn from the report that resonated for me and require thoughtful response.

First, I concur with the report's underlying premise that the social sciences, arts and humanities (SSAH) are essential to Western's vision and mission as a comprehensive university. I share wholeheartedly the view that it is the breadth, depth and variety of scholarship across all disciplines that makes Western one of Canada's top research-intensive universities.

Further, it's critical to emphasize and re-affirm that Western respects and values research and scholarship of all kinds, across all disciplines, each with its own distinctive set of methodologies and modes of public engagement and dissemination. This recognition presupposes that some scholars' work is more solitary in nature than others and does not readily lend itself to the kinds of collaborations and indicators forged in other parts of the university, nor does such research require significant funding for its pursuit.

Second, we acknowledge and appreciate that research outcomes vary quite broadly across disciplines and include performances, gallery exhibitions and community-engaged scholarship, among many others. To be sure, research takes myriad shapes and while universities are pressed increasingly to demonstrate 'impact', efforts to measure successful outcomes must be as dexterous and as thoughtful, as manifold.

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The URB report sheds light on the sense of marginalization that some colleagues are experiencing, along with the anxiety caused by the increasing difficulty to sustain research programs given changes to the internal and external funding environment. This is as regrettable as it is pervasive across North America and beyond. Nevertheless, the University, working in partnership with our resident scholars, remains committed to mitigating these challenges.

In fact, we've already taken some important steps, including an investment of \$5 million from the 2016-17 budget to establish a new endowment, the proceeds from which will be used exclusively to fund SSAH scholarship. This is in addition to approximately \$2 million Western already distributes through its internal funding programs. While the investment of "more resources" is not always possible, or appropriate, as a solution to addressing the challenges we face, the new SSAH endowment should go a long way to enhancing support for these disciplines.

Third, it's important to acknowledge that many funding challenges facing university research in general, and SSAH disciplines in particular, arise in large measure due to external factors beyond control of central administration. For example, it should be noted that during the past 10 years, federal expenditures on higher education and development research as a percentage of GDP fell from third to eighth place among OECD countries.

However, there are positive signals coming from the federal government that it's prepared to increase investment in university research. In addition to the new \$2-billion *Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund* announced in March, a nine-member expert panel, chaired by former University of Toronto president and Western alumnus David Naylor, has also been named to conduct a review of how the government funds university-based research.

Reporting to Science Minister Kirsty Duncan, the panel has been given a broad mandate to study all three federal granting councils (NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR) along with ancillary organizations such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation and Genome Canada that also allocate research funding to the post-secondary sector. Collectively, these funding bodies will distribute more than \$3 billion to Canadian researchers and their labs this year, and the timing for such a review is significant given increasing demands and expectations placed on government to support creativity and innovation in our universities.

Fourth and lastly, I remain heartened to see recognition of the fact that all faculty make critical contributions in creating the kind of research and scholarship culture we desire and deserve. From taking greater collective ownership for communicating and promoting the value of SSAH research and scholarship, to dedicating time to serving on peer-review boards and other research and scholarship committees, we all have important roles to play in expanding our understanding, appreciation, and dedication to the advancement of research.

If you haven't read the report, I encourage you to do so. You will find it and its appendices posted on our Research website at <http://www.uwo.ca/research/excellence/index.html>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John P. Capone', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

John P. Capone  
Vice-President (Research)