

## Social Sciences Subcommittee Report to Paul Whitney on CAS strategic planning effort

Ted Beauchaine (Psychology, faculty), Francis Benjamin (Psychology, AP), Cornell Clayton (PPPA), Zachary Hamilton (Criminal Justice), Monica Johnson (Sociology), and Tim Kohler (reporter; Anthropology)  
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### 1. What are the most significant disciplinary strengths in the areas represented in your committee that the college should recognize and build on? How are these strengths manifest in educating undergraduates or graduate students? How are these strengths manifest in research or creative activity?

Some *commonalities* providing possible bases for collaboration and building include

- Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and CJC are all strong in methods;
- Sociology and Anthropology both work on questions of social inequality (archaeology is interested in its emergence; Sociology in its current operation). Equality/inequality is a research focus for faculty in the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs (PPPA) as well;
- Psychology and Anthropology both stand at the intersection between the social sciences and biology, and CJC is interested in the impact criminal justice policies have on public health at the aggregate and individual levels;
- CJC shares with Psychology research and instruction on psychometrics and risk assessment, the extension and use of latent variable methodologies, drug and alcohol abuse addiction research, and assessment of sleep and sleep deprivation as an occupational hazard;
- PPPA, Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology all have faculty and research foci in environmental issues, including sustainability, risk, and environmental disasters; and
- Sociology, CJC and PPPA are all interested in social justice, courts, crime and deviance, and social control.

Some *distinctive strengths* in our cluster include:

- Psychology is particularly well respected for its doctoral program in Clinical Psychology. Research foci on how experience is captured, processed, and represented; how our past and present experiences affect our decisions about ongoing and future behavior; the social and health consequences of our decisions, behaviors, and living contexts; and how to reduce inter-group conflict, make its programs unique on campus. Its achievements in maintaining a very large undergraduate program (5-6% of all WSU students are Psychology majors), and in training more undergraduates per tenure track faculty member than almost all other department on campus, are notable;
- Sociology is also well-respected for its graduate program, including being one of only a handful of nationally-ranked programs to train in environmental sociology and being fairly unique in the breadth of methods taught along with ties to a major survey research organization (SESRC); other strengths lie in race and gender dynamics of work, labor markets, and organizations, as well as in crime and social control, and in the study of population, family, and the life course as well as political sociology;
- Anthropology's strengths (disproportionate to its size) in archaeology, especially that of western North America; its Museum of Anthropology providing a locus for collaboration with the Plateau Center, the MOU tribes, and several federal agencies whose collections it

- curates; its focus on computational modeling in both archaeology and evolutionary anthropology; its shared appointment (and research) with SBS on human and animal aDNA; an on-going collaboration with the Allen School of Global Animal Health; and its sizeable graduate program, of long standing, constituting some 10% of the CAS graduate enrollment;
- PPPA has unique strengths in public policy, sustainable democracy, and ethics (especially bioethics and public ethics). It also has a unique degree of interdisciplinarity already built into the school;
  - CJC has unique strengths in the examination of relationships between criminal justice policies and institutions and public health issues, including fatigue on police performance, mental health, drug use on prisoner reentry, risk assessments for offender populations, and therapeutic jurisprudence (drug courts). Furthermore, the department's presence in Spokane provides additional opportunities not available to departments in Pullman or Vancouver.

These programs report successes in research publications, national leadership positions, editorships of major journals, external grant acquisitions, national and international honors for their faculty, and the job placement of our students; space precludes more detail here.

**2. What are the most important impediments to capitalizing on our established or emerging strengths so that the faculty can have impact equal to or greater than our aspirational peers? Please be more specific than "money."**

- Most programs report a loss of tenure-track faculty since the 1990s. Others (e.g., Criminal Justice) report an imbalance of faculty seniority (most of their faculty are junior), although here the root cause is the rapid growth of criminal justice and criminology as a discipline nationally; this growth is outpacing our faculty capacity;
  - This loss of tenure-track faculty has been accompanied by a significant increase in undergraduate student credit hours and majors.
  - Faculty support (software acquisition, travel, and office staff) has declined as well.
  - Taken together, the loss of faculty, reduced resources for faculty and growing student to faculty ratio is taking a toll on morale and productivity.
- Psychology's emerging foci on health and prevention-related research, and on energy-related research, is now being supported by two new hires, but will need to continue to grow to develop a critical mass;
- Psychology has not responded well to the field's shift toward biological research in recent years. For example, psychology departments (and other biobehavioral sciences) at almost all R1 institutions either maintain or have access to neuroimaging facilities for functional studies of the human brain. At WSU we do not;
- To continue supporting important CAS and university initiatives, PPPA need to replace a key line in environmental policy, and add lines in health-care policy and bioethics/policy;
- Anthropology and SBS are collaborating on a proposal for a new joint undergraduate program in Human Biology. To make Anthropology a full partner in this collaboration will require a new hire in evolutionary anthropology that develops our program in human genetics, bioarchaeology, primate behavioral ecology, or at the computational intersection of evolutionary ecology and human biology, to complement our existing strengths in medical and psychological anthropology;
- Labs appear to be an issue across this cluster. Sociology reports a need for a new lab (and associated software) supporting their training in data analysis and providing analysis support to

students and faculty. Anthropology report labs with out-of-date equipment and sees a need to develop an ongoing mechanism to (1) recapitalize these labs and (2) keep their equipment up-to-date.

- It is generally difficult for us to attract the highest-quality graduate students (those who come prepared for the rigors of research training), and we feel a lack of institutional support for day-to-day activities (i.e., setting up meetings, sending faxes, mailing letters of recommendations for our students) and perceive increasing demands on faculty time related to teaching (i.e., UCORE, required midterm grade submission for all students, system changes) and teaching higher enrollment courses.
- Sociology would like to rebuild its colloquium series (which would require better staff support, as noted above, so they could take care of scheduling and the details of speaker visits), and Anthropology fears the demise of its very successful IPEM Seminar (in December 2012) which promotes strong intellectual connections with members of our department in Vancouver, and anthropologists at the UW.

**3. Are there new strategies for supporting departmental excellence that the college should consider? How would these strategic initiatives help us meet our goals? Are there metrics that would allow us to define success?**

- Investment in infrastructure for a social science analysis lab (space, software, staffing) supporting GIS, statistics, database instruction, and computational modeling;
- Giving departments more flexibility and control as a general strategy;
- Visibility, perhaps featuring departments (in rotation) on the CAS website and working with PR/media folks to better publicize accomplishments and research efforts of departments and individual faculty in the College. Associated metrics could be amount of news coverage and fundraising;
- One common metric of success for all departments is graduate and undergraduate teaching excellence. Many of the departments in the Social Sciences have among the highest faculty to student FTE ratios in the College (both undergraduate and graduate majors). Given new university budget models, departments with heavy teaching demands should be resourced and incentivized;
- Another common metric on which the success is judged is procurement of extramural funds. Although many of our faculty are quite successful in obtaining grant funding, as a group we are not as competitive as top-ranked programs. One possibility is implementation of an incentive system aimed at increasing support for faculty grant-writing. Many of our peer institutions have somewhat lighter teaching loads. Although we understand the constraints on Administration in reducing teaching loads, some flexibility may be possible. For example, a temporary one-course reduction might be granted for a faculty member without current buyouts who submits a proposal for significant grant funding. A direct metric for success would be an observed increase in funding;
- Create a continuum of funding for graduate students, whereby talented Ph.D. students; transition from grading, to teaching independent sections, to research assistantships so as to increase program attractiveness to quality graduate students. A related idea would be to fund CAS-level support for graduate doctoral writing fellowships to complete the degree unfettered. These would be competitive, with a maximum of one candidate forwarded per department.

**4. Are there opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration that we aren't doing already that would advance the missions of the college and units in the college? Can you identify strategies for fostering those collaborations?**

- Interdisciplinary collaborations take time to be successful, especially at the beginning when people are trying to understand each others' problems, language, etc. With other demands on faculty's time increasing, we need to find ways to facilitate committing the time to these efforts that they require.
- Several universities have entities like a "Center for the Study of Complex Systems" that foster creative collaborations both inside and outside the university. WSU might consider forming a center, perhaps under the banner of a "Center for Computational Social Sciences," that could involve most or all of the departments represented in this subcommittee, along with elements from Computer Science and Mathematics;
- Other opportunities for collaboration, beyond those mentioned above, should emerge from expansion of the health sciences in Spokane. For example, psychologists often collaborate with radiology departments to conduct functional neuroimaging research with humans. Political scientists, philosophers, medical anthropologists, and sociologists also play critical roles in health-care policy, ethics, and inequality. Such collaborations are mutually beneficial because psychology departments of our size cannot support the overhead of expensive neuroimaging and other health-care-related research equipment, and the health sciences can offset overhead by allowing psychologists and other scientists to buy time on their equipment and through consideration of joint hires. However, these collaborations can be difficult because disciplinary needs are so divergent. Accordingly, top-down support for any such initiative would likely be needed from the Deans of the Health Sciences and CAS;
- An important opportunity for collaboration for Sociology is the SESRC; a joint hire was attempted last year, but not filled. It remains a strategic opportunity and may require revisiting to find the right structure;
- PNNL in the Tri-Cities provides a natural collaborative partner for archaeologists in Anthropology to expand their materials science interests, but so far we have been unable to develop any collaborations with them. We might consider a tenure-track hire in archaeological materials sciences on the WSU Tri-Cities campus to foster these collaborations. In general Anthropology has been very pleased with its joint hire with SBS, and would like to be able to consider joint hires between anthropology and computer science, math, geology in the School of the Environment, SBS and the Allen School of Global Animal Health in any future expansion hires.
- Connect faculty and students across disciplines to enable them to address problems that transcend disciplinary boundaries through new joint seminars providing instruction in content and topics that cross disciplines; through creating one or more training centers to take advantage of advanced methodological skills currently isolated within a single department; by providing an interdisciplinary symposium to establish collaborations and generate new shared research interests; and tangibly support interdisciplinary research groups tied to required output.
- Encouraging linkages between CJC, Psychology, and the Health Sciences in Spokane, building on their co-location to provide more interdisciplinary research and graduate instruction.