Report of the
Social Sciences
Administrative Structures Committee

Cornell University

January 29, 2019

Committee Members
Alexander Colvin, Industrial and Labor Relations (Co-chair)
Barbara Knuth, Natural Resources (Co-chair)
Sturt Manning, Classics (Co-chair)

Linda Barrington, Industrial and Labor Relations
Maria Fitzpatrick, Policy Analysis and Management
Craig Higgins, College of Human Ecology
Mary-Margaret Klempa, Office of Sponsored Research
Oneka LaBennett, Africana Studies
Poppy McLeod, Communication
Max Pfeffer, Development Sociology
Loren Tauer, Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management
David Taylor, College of Arts and Sciences
Nicolas van de Walle, Government
Kim Weeden, Sociology
Executive Summary

The Social Sciences Administrative Structures Committee was charged to “make recommendations on improving support structures that would help faculty advance social sciences research.” The Committee’s deliberations recognized the diversity among social science units’ cultures regarding authorship practices (sole vs. group), importance (or not) of external funding to produce high-quality research, and practices related to teaching and service responsibilities. Building on prior reports and with input from social sciences faculty and academic and administrative units about their policies, practices, and procedures, the Committee developed recommendations focusing on three areas:

1. Providing adequate support for social sciences research activity and funding; 2. Reducing teaching and service demands (especially those outside the classroom) on social sciences faculty time; and 3. Providing additional resources for (i) social sciences graduate education, and (ii) additional postdoc positions in the social sciences.

Enhance Support for Social Sciences Research Activity and Funding

- Improve central pre-award support for single-investigator and multi-investigator external proposals through grant-writing training and workshops, targeted outreach for new and continuing faculty, enhanced support for seeking foundation funding, assistance making connections across Cornell disciplines, funding a scheme for honoraria for external pre-submission proposal reviews, and implementing strategic support for grant writing through teaching release and/or summer support.
- Colleges or an appropriate central unit should improve post-award grant support resources.
- Cornell should reduce perceived barriers to advancing social sciences research, such as moving to one research degree tuition rate for all social sciences graduate fields, addressing perceived indirect cost barriers described in our report, increasing the size and number of internally-funded grant awards, increasing the number of graduate students admitted in fields where faculty-student ratios fall below our aspirational peers (dependent on adequate funding packages to support them), and providing a competitive awards pool to fund graduate student research assistants and postdoctoral fellows.

Address Teaching and Service Demands on Social Sciences Faculty Time

- Colleges and departments should assess all aspects of workloads around teaching in holistic terms in order to maximize quality faculty time for both teaching and research, including addressing study leave practices, teaching buy-out policies, per-semester teaching requirements, and the impacts of other service responsibilities.

Focus and Enhance Resources for Social Sciences Graduate Education

- Through philanthropy or reallocation of resources, provide Sage graduate fellowships to all social sciences graduate fields, increase numbers of funded places to nearer peer institution ratios, and increase the availability of internally funded RA positions.
- The Graduate School should continue to encourage and require social sciences graduate fields to operate following the spirit and expectations of Cornell’s system of graduate education where graduate faculty field memberships cross department/college boundaries, with appropriate rights and privileges of membership.

Create a Center for the Social Sciences at Cornell

- Such a center, properly staffed and supported, may offer an efficient mechanism to facilitate and enable several of the recommendations, eliminating the need for redundant administrative and support structures in several colleges.
Introduction and Charge

As the third committee in Cornell University’s social sciences review effort (in addition to an organizational structures committee and an ideas committee), the Cornell University Provost in Fall, 2018 charged the Social Sciences Administrative Structures Committee to “make recommendations on improving support structures that would help faculty advance social sciences research.” The Provost’s charge drew from a prior Social Sciences External Review Committee report and related internal discussions that had raised concerns about issues such as:

- insufficient support for grant writing in the social sciences,
- insufficient or differing incentives across Cornell units for grant-writing in the social sciences,
- potential negative impacts of Cornell unit rules regarding less-than-full indirect cost recovery on awards,
- inconsistent indirect cost distribution policies back to units and faculty,
- potential problems associated with a perceived heavy reliance at Cornell on funding through teaching assistantships for support of social sciences PhD students, and
- inconsistent funding packages for graduate students across colleges, potentially impeding collaboration.

The Social Sciences Administrative Structures Committee (hereafter, Committee) summarized this charge with several questions to guide its work:

- What structures, policies, and practices impede social sciences faculty from being productive scholars and advancing social sciences research (both externally and internally supported)?
- How can these impediments be lessened?
- What structures, policies, and practices should be harmonized across colleges?
- What would be gained from harmonization (what problems would be solved that impede faculty ability to advance social sciences research at Cornell)?

The Committee met throughout Fall, 2018 and into January 2019. In addition to Committee deliberations, we solicited input from the wider Cornell social sciences faculty via a Qualtrics survey that sought to help characterize departmental and disciplinary differences among social sciences units related to publishing (e.g., sole vs. group authorship; with or without graduate students), relative importance of external funding for conducting research and for evaluation of faculty accomplishment, perceptions regarding the adequacy of incentives and administrative support associated with securing external funding, and key impediments that impinge on faculty ability to advance their research. We also gathered information from academic and administrative units on campus about their policies, practices, and procedures (e.g., indirect cost return, teaching buy out, teaching loads), as well as various data characterizing research, teaching, and graduate education activity in social science units at Cornell.

Our recommendations are grouped into three categories related to advancing social sciences research at Cornell:

- Providing adequate support for social sciences research activity and funding;
• Reducing teaching and service demands (especially those outside the classroom) on social sciences faculty time; and
• Providing resources for both social sciences graduate education and postdoctoral research associates (which we highlight as, in each case, linking directly with research activity).

Our recommendations were influenced via discussion of several key issues and questioning of certain assumptions throughout the Committee’s deliberations, reflecting the diversity of social science cultures at Cornell:

• Social sciences disciplines vary in the importance of sole authored vs. small group vs. larger group authored scholarly products. Likewise, disciplines vary in the culture of publishing with (or without) graduate students as lead or co-authors.
• Social sciences units at Cornell, and different social science disciplinary cultures more broadly, vary in the perceived value associated with securing external funding and its necessity/utility in some areas of research activity beyond making research time available. Similarly, Cornell departments and colleges vary in the emphasis placed on external funding in evaluating faculty accomplishment (for promotion, tenure, and salary awards), with some viewing securing external funding as an integral part of faculty responsibilities while others view it as an add-on activity or not essential to produce high-quality research in these areas.
• Social scientists seeking external funding typically have a heavier reliance than in other disciplines on foundation and other (relatively smaller) sources of external funds than on large federal funding agencies (e.g., NIH, NSF) common in other non-humanities disciplines. In particular, the very modest level of NSF support for the Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) sciences – just 4% of the FY2018 budget request of the NSF to Congress (https://www.nsf.gov/about/budget/fy2018/tables.jsp) – necessarily leads to limited grant maximum awards (compounded by practices of some NSF programs relevant to the social sciences that typically preclude specific cost elements standard in other science areas so as to spread modest funds to more investigators). Among other impacts, this situation limits the potential in the social sciences to fund faculty research time and support staff from external federal sources.
• Social science units at Cornell differ in practices related to faculty responsibilities, particularly related to expected teaching loads, eligibility for study leaves, and ability to buy out of teaching responsibilities.

Though not unanimous on every point, the recommendations below represent a general consensus among Committee members.

Recommendations

Enhance Support for Social Sciences Research Activity and Funding

Social science faculty do not have adequate resources and support, including pre- and post-award support, from central and college sources. This compounds the more limited external funding options in
the social sciences. Social sciences faculty also perceive the lack of quality support to be a barrier and disincentive to advancing social science research at Cornell.

Enhance Pre-award Grant Support

1. Increase and improve central pre-award support for both single-investigator and multi-investigator external proposals, including grants and fellowships. Create and support a culture that values winning external funding in areas where this is appropriate (while also recognizing research value in other areas that do not require external funding to produce quality research). The Committee did not have the ability to model the scope of increased effort necessary, but recommends that OVPR/OSP develop a plan (in consultation with colleges, departments and research centers, e.g. CPC, CSI, ISS, as appropriate) to assess existing resources and identify what actions or resources are necessary to provide enhanced pre-award support for social sciences faculty that would include:
   a. Grant-writing training and workshops tailored to the social sciences.
   b. Targeted outreach and support to the needs of new faculty, including junior scholars who may be new to faculty research generally and senior scholars new to Cornell University. These efforts may include one-on-one or group meetings to discuss funding opportunities and develop multi-year strategic research plans, providing a specific administrative liaison for every new faculty to help navigate Cornell resources related to research, workshops and one-on-one grant writing support for early career funding and other key opportunities and to establish the basis for an on-going productive relationship for faculty with OSP/OVPR.
   c. Targeted outreach and support to the needs of all Cornell social sciences faculty, perhaps with social sciences specialist(s) in OVPR/OSP, including ongoing advertising of potential funding sources to social sciences faculty and guidance throughout the process of developing the proposal, budget, and supporting documents.
   d. Enhanced attention, in partnership with Alumni Affairs & Development as appropriate, to develop contacts and personal relationships with program officers in foundations and other potential funding sources and facilitate access of faculty to these resources. Identify several Tier 1 foundations relevant to social sciences to develop relationships and funding strategies. Develop guidance materials and best practices for cultivating relationships and writing white papers or proposals for foundations.
   e. Guidance and support for faculty to cultivate relationships with program officers in federal agencies with a social sciences funding mission.
   f. Continue to support existing and new ways to facilitate faculty both within and across disciplines (including life and physical sciences and engineering) at Cornell in making connections with one another to improve Cornell’s engagement in cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research opportunities. This should include support for new and existing cross-disciplinary teaching initiatives, and support that encourages social science minor members to be on physical or biological science graduate student committees, etc.

2. Colleges and/or a social sciences center should provide funds to support external grant proposal preparation by way of (variously) teaching release, small seed grants, or summer
salary (for example via a competitive pre-proposal competition each year/semester). Future eligibility would depend on submission of the stated application.

3. Colleges and/or a social sciences center should further provide funds to support better proposals from social science faculty by providing modest honoraria for external reviews of pre-submission proposals (amount to be determined after field consultation). (Alternatively this could be a general scheme for all research areas at Cornell administered via OSP.)

Enhance Post-award Grant Support

1. Colleges (or a social sciences center) should improve social sciences post-award grant support, for single investigator and multi-investigator awards. This should include providing:
   a. Trained staff to support post-award budget management needs and interpretation of award requirements.
   b. A targeted central resource either within each College, or within a Center for the Social Sciences, for a small team of administrative staff who can efficiently support project logistics and build and retain know-how (e.g., travel planning for research groups, managing details of engaged community partnerships). Most research groups in the physical and life sciences handle such tasks internally given their much greater resources. This is impractical across most social science disciplines – hence a specialized central resource is appropriate.

2. If as we recommend Cornell decides to establish a Center for the Social Sciences, based on the idea put forward by the Social Sciences Review Organizational Structures Committee, this Center could provide some of the pre-award and post-award grant support services described here. A common theme in the committee’s information gathering is lack of consistency in faculty awareness of procedures, policies, and opportunities related to research support and external funding. A new Center for the Social Sciences could be tasked with providing a central locus for information about research support and funding, as well as running programs designed to better inform faculty about opportunities and otherwise facilitate faculty research through workshops, setting up mentoring relationships, award administration, and so on.

Reduce Perceived Research Activity Barriers

1. Cornell should reduce tuition costs on endowed social sciences grant budgets and reduce cross-unit challenges by moving to one research degree tuition rate for all social sciences graduate fields at the “contract college” rate ($20,800/year vs. $29,500/year for the endowed rate). This approach is currently used for all life sciences graduate fields, whose tuition is charged at the contract college rate and is an example of the non-level playing field at Cornell at present. Estimated loss of annual tuition revenue (from external sources) to consolidate all social science fields at the contract college rate is $190K in the endowed colleges.

2. In addition to existing small grant schemes, Cornell should increase the size and number of internally-funded grant awards available to social sciences faculty – to a scale to be large enough to be useful (e.g. support an RA or postdoc for 1 year). Flexible, relatively small amounts of funds with low entry barriers would help social science investigators test and ground-truth ideas that should often lead to further external grant activity or additional cross-
university collaborations. Teaching release awards or new small grants to support faculty summer salaries should be created to support faculty working on external funding proposals based on an annual or every semester call and competition. As with other similar schemes, subsequent support would depend on satisfactory delivery (of a consequent external grant application, a publication, a white paper, or other recognized research product) from any such preliminary or seed grant. The Committee notes that while raising external grant activity is a key aim, Cornell should also support and value more modest cost projects (e.g. under $75K) that of themselves deliver valuable research products and especially as relevant to those areas of the social sciences where single author or small group work dominate and large external grants are typically less relevant.

3. Establish a pool of funds and slim-line competitive application procedures for social sciences faculty to be able to apply for funding for one-year graduate student Research Assistants, or multi-year postdoctoral fellows to be administered by the council of the proposed Cornell Social Sciences Center (an increased service element but supported by the new center and with council membership of limited term and rotating). These positions would support faculty in doing preliminary analysis leading to development of external grant proposal ideas, or help writing grant submissions. For new faculty, including Research Assistant and/or postdoctoral fellow funding in start-up packages is also recommended. A social sciences council of the new Social Sciences Center, on the model of the Society for the Humanities, composed of elected and rotating members of the faculty, could be charged with running/reviewing and deciding this and other competitions noted. As in the case of the Society for the Humanities, this is a substantial responsibility, but terms are only a few years and members rotate off, so this provides a relatively fair and efficient way to concentrate service in one place rather than spread it over multiple groups.

4. See recommendations below in the section on reducing general teaching demands (especially non-classroom activities) and service as regards social science faculty time.

Address Indirect Cost Rates, Salary Recovery, and Fringe Benefits

1. At least annually, colleges should communicate with faculty and administrative managers the college requirements and procedures for (1) indirect cost recovery (F&A rates), particularly minimum allowable indirect cost recovery and procedures available for faculty to request approval for less-than-full indirect cost rates in grant proposals; (2) returning salary recovery funds to faculty for academic year and summer research activity; and (3) fringe benefit rate alternatives for reducing costs on grants (e.g., using endowed fringe rates on contract college grants for postdocs or other personnel, or endowed fringe rates for contract college faculty summer salaries). An annual communication to faculty about these procedures can serve as encouragement to faculty to pursue external funds and provide assurance that the college accepts a variety of indirect cost recovery rates and supports efforts to minimize various administrative costs on faculty external awards.

2. Every five years, Sponsored Financial Services should update and post a comparison of Cornell vs. flagship state and private peers’ on-campus indirect cost rates. Prominently posting this information would help minimize the mythology and associated complaints that Cornell’s indirect cost rates are significantly higher than peers’ rates or more restrictive. Faculty report this belief
discourages some faculty from pursuing external funding, or motivates them to run their grant proposals and awards through other institutions.

3. The university budget model component related to allocated cost charges for research expenditures should be revised for the social sciences to exclude from the calculation external awards that provide indirect costs that are less than the research function allocation charge. For example, the research allocated cost component is currently 18%, which means that external awards that include less than 18% indirect costs are perceived to be a “loss” for the unit. This leads to faculty being discouraged to pursue funding sources that provide less than 18% indirect costs. However, social sciences faculty may rely more heavily on foundation funding compared to other disciplines, and foundations (and especially some of the prestigious ones) more commonly have relatively low (or no) allowable indirect costs compared to federal funding agencies that are more relevant in other disciplines. We note there is more than one way to try to address this issue – that a fixed 18% threshold blocks potentially important social science external support – and suggest that the office of the vice president for budget and planning consider the best way to achieve the aim of removing this hurdle to external funding applications in the social sciences where relevant.

4. When Cornell’s F&A rate is renegotiated (likely in 2021), the Division of Financial Affairs should be encouraged to analyze the implications of changing from a 2-month absence period to a 1-month absence period as the minimum for using the off-campus indirect cost rate (26%). Based on FY19 figures, the estimated annual magnitude of F&A revenues reduced would be $150K for contract colleges and $190K for endowed colleges. Social sciences faculty may use the summer for field work, but for periods of time shorter than two months. In addition, the 2-month-absence requirement may provide barriers for faculty who have family commitments in Ithaca over the summer.

**Address Teaching and Service Demands on Social Sciences Faculty Time**

Faculty and roles are not evenly distributed across Cornell in the social sciences. Thus although the number of social science faculty has increased at Cornell as a whole, this has not been even across social science departments. Some core areas, for example in the College of Arts & Sciences, have seen little change in faculty size and face substantial demands on faculty time from an overload of teaching, administration, and service responsibilities as inevitable in small departments with good enrollment. Faculty widely reported across the social sciences that such factors impinged on their ability to advance research. As observed in a variety of Cornell social sciences and department-level external review reports, the social science departments at Cornell are relatively small compared to peers (in terms of number of faculty). This inevitably causes service, administration, and teaching time per faculty member to be higher relative to peers at other institutions. This places Cornell at a distinct disadvantage and demoralizes faculty. The Committee focused its discussion mainly on addressing time required for teaching and service. Committee discussions also noted the potential value of increasing the number of social sciences faculty overall at Cornell, concerns associated with potential social sciences unit mergers, and challenges with recruiting and retaining excellent faculty, but determined those issues were for other groups to address and beyond the charge of this Committee.
1. Colleges and departments should assess teaching load expectations and study leave practices, and where assigned teaching loads are higher than typical for the discipline (compared to peers) or study leaves are lower than typical for the discipline, identify solutions to reduce assigned teaching loads and/or increase study leaves. There is substantial diversity in teaching load and study leave practices across social science departments at Cornell. In units with a 4-course/year load, a one-semester study leave after 6 semesters of teaching is common. In other units, 3 courses/year is the typical load, with no study leaves (other than sabbatic leaves). Other social science units typically assign 5 courses over 4 semesters, or 2.5 courses/year. Rather than recommend centrally directed harmonization of these practices across the university and across all social science departments, the Committee instead recommends that local solutions (at the department and/or college level) will be most effective in controlling teaching (and service/administration) loads to enable faculty to have appropriate time to conduct their expected research responsibilities.

2. Colleges and departments should assess current teaching buy-out policies and revise as needed to foster flexible approaches that enable faculty to “earn” teaching relief that provides more time to advance research activity. As with approaches to teaching loads above, the Committee believes buy-out solutions are best developed at the local level, but should explicitly recognize the value of faculty having summer and academic year time to devote to research, time that could be liberated through flexible (and attainable) course buy-out policies. Such “buy-outs” need not therefore only be for whole courses or semesters, but could also be creatively structured around joint courses and other partial teaching reduction strategies as suitable to a given College or Department context. Grant-related teaching buy-outs should be available to faculty who already have administration-related reduced teaching load. Colleges could proactively offer teaching load reductions as an incentive for faculty to work on pre-award grant-writing activities for large proposals, center grants, multi-disciplinary team projects, etc. To be practical, this implies some increase in faculty numbers in given areas and thus a move to make Cornell more comparable and competitive versus peers.

3. Colleges and departments should provide flexibility in the per-semester teaching requirements for faculty to allow faculty to have more discretion about the timing of their teaching and provide opportunities for faculty to advance field-based research during the academic year as well as the summer as appropriate to the subject of their scholarship. For example, social sciences faculty may be allowed to teach the bulk of their teaching load in one semester rather than across two, or may be allowed to teach courses in winter or summer months without incurring additional complexities (e.g., additional student tuition costs) through Continuing Education and Summer Session. Current problems with summer or winter tuition not necessarily flowing to the tenure college of faculty, and student enrollment challenges (e.g., undergraduate financial aid eligibility) would need to be addressed.

4. Where possible, social science departments should limit administrative roles (e.g., department chair, director of undergraduate studies, director of graduate studies) to full professors. Again this highlights the issue of several departments with relatively small numbers of faculty compared to peers.

5. Cornell should avoid the accretion of new structures (without discarding old ones) that require additional social science faculty administrative time. Similarly, Cornell leadership should make decisions about the future of Cornell social sciences and implement change to avoid having yet
more task forces on social sciences that consume social science faculty time without positive impact.

Focus and Enhance Resources for Social Sciences Graduate Education

Although other social sciences reports have raised questions about the potential value of decreasing the number of social sciences graduate fields (e.g., through mergers), there was little to no support for such approaches in the Committee or in comments solicited from social sciences faculty (in the abstract – in large part because decisions to merge or eliminate fields should be made in conjunction with decisions about department structures, matters outside the scope of this committee). Instead, discussion focused on strategic deployment of graduate student funding resources (e.g., fellowships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships), and in fostering the desired behaviors and practices of graduate fields to adhere to the ideals and policies of the inclusive field-based system of Cornell graduate education (as opposed to approaches that privilege the primacy of departments).

1. Strategically deploy university and college graduate student funding resources to advance social sciences research in units meeting criteria such as:
   a. graduate student advising and mentoring is productive and effective;
   b. graduate student mentoring is integral to advancing faculty research;
   c. graduate student training as teaching assistants is appropriately integrated with students’ overall academic program progress and goals;
   d. faculty have demonstrated success in securing external funding to support additional students and research.

2. Through philanthropy in the upcoming campaign or through reallocation of resources, increase doctoral fellowship funds.
   a. As noted above, in some fields graduate student to faculty ratios at Cornell are lower than those in peer institutions. For example, in Sociology, peers such as Columbia, Harvard, Stanford and Yale range from 1.7 PhD students:1 faculty to as many as 4 PhD students:1 faculty, whereas Cornell’s Sociology graduate field ratio is about 1.4 PhD students:1 field faculty. This affects research and recruitment, both of the best graduate students but also, critically, of the best faculty. It also demotivates faculty from applying for grants to involve graduate students, since they are relatively scarce, and so rather than work on a grant, faculty may well choose to work on getting an external offer.
   b. Cornell should further harmonize Graduate School doctoral fellowships across social science fields to provide Sage fellowships to all social science fields. Currently of 17 social science fields, nine social sciences fields receive Cornell fellowships and eight social sciences fields receive Sage fellowships. Cornell fellowships provide one academic year (9 months) funding. Sage fellowships provide 2 academic years and 4 summers of funding. Converting all social sciences fields to Sage fellowships (at the current number of students on fellowships) would cost about an additional $2M annually. This move would better support a high-quality social science graduate program and recruitment of the very best students (even if numbers remain below those of peers) and resolve some current areas of conflict between un-evenly resourced units.
3. Through philanthropy in the upcoming campaign or through reallocation of resources, increase the number of internally funded research assistantships. These could be provided by the department and/or college, including as part of start-up packages where that is not currently done. As mentioned earlier, research assistants could also be awarded to support faculty research through an expansion of internal grant competitions (such as the existing ISS small grant competition), to be (as above) run relatively efficiently by a new Center for the Social Sciences and a rotating faculty council. The Committee heard of the need both to better support new faculty but also to provide opportunities for new projects and research initiatives for existing faculty and especially mid-career existing faculty (both as an enhancement but also a retention strategy).

4. It is recognized that the graduate fields in the social sciences with faculty from multiple departments (and colleges) can encounter issues where essential TA funding comes via departments and these packages follow department faculty teaching large courses or departments providing FWS courses, or from grants won. Provision of Sage fellowships for all social science graduates admitted would go a long way to alleviate this tension and would provide a competitive package versus some peers (other peers offer 3 years of fellowship + three years guaranteed TA/RA funding, thus one more year of fellowship than the Sage model). At the same time, it is recognized that social sciences fields must operate in the spirit and expectations of Cornell’s system of graduate education in which graduate faculty memberships, rights and responsibilities in a field cross department/college boundaries. The Graduate School should ensure its policies regarding fields, and support for students in graduate fields (notwithstanding departmental affiliations of faculty), are universally followed.