Cornell Social Science External Advisory Committee

Executive Summary of Points

September 5, 2006

1. The Arts and Sciences departments in Cornell’s College of Arts and Sciences are not as strong as other divisions at Cornell. They are not as strong as they should be and can be.

2. We believe there is potential in all the social science departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, and new arrangements between other colleges at Cornell and the College of Arts and Sciences can strengthen all of these colleges.

3. Cornell should act now so as not to fall farther behind compared to peers.

4. The most immediate challenge is to create a plan for achieving more strength in the social sciences. Such a plan cannot be modeled on either the sciences or the humanities.

5. We explore various arrangements including fractional joint appointments.

6. Recruitment packages do not appear to be competitive. If Cornell is to succeed in the social sciences, competitive and strong salary, buy-out, IDC sharing packages must be put forward. Indeed, higher than market level salaries and other incentives should be considered.

7. “Cluster hiring” should be considered along the NYU and Columbia models. We single out development economics as an area where Cornell could be successful.

8. Cornell has a proliferation of small centers. We are not sure we know enough to say whether this works to Cornell’s advantage or disadvantage. Some of us suspect the latter. At the least, Cornell should examine the organization and number of its social science centers.

9. Cornell’s internal examinations have led to many good ideas. These ideas must be linked to a strategic plan.

10. We hope that Cornell’s soon to be announced Capital Campaign will feature the social sciences.
Cornell Social Science External Advisory Committee

Full Report

Cornell is a great university, one of the world’s leading research universities. It is better known for its strength in engineering, the sciences and the humanities than for the social sciences. The panel believes this to be a fair judgment and so do faculty and administrators.

When we say social sciences, we are referring to a wide variety of activities, crossing over schools and centers. We do believe that a great university should have excellent social science departments and centers. We believe, and it is necessary to say this up front, that the reputation of the social sciences requires that the conventional social science departments in the college of Arts and Sciences—economics, political science, psychology, sociology, anthropology—be strengthened. To certain extents, we believe that Cornell’s social sciences strengths have been greater compared to peers at certain of Cornell’s Colleges, such as in ILR, the Hotel School, Human Ecology, Agriculture, the Johnson School of Management, than at the “core” disciplines in Arts and Sciences. We also believe that the strengths in these other Colleges at Cornell can help to strengthen the “core.”

Let us expand on this point. Cornell does not get “credit” for much of its social science strength. As a result, the whole of social sciences at Cornell is not as great as the sum of the parts. An example from Economics, which we suspect is applicable to a greater or less extent in the other social sciences, suggests that there are far reaching consequences of the decentralized structure of Colleges at Cornell. Cornell has important strengths in Applied Economics (e.g. labor economics in the ILR School, agricultural and development economics in the Ag School, economic analysis of public policy in Human Ecology) although these fields are not well represented within the Economics Department in the College of Arts and Sciences. We suspect that the Economics Department in Arts and Sciences has not developed much strength in applied fields because they are well represented elsewhere at
Cornell. Such a strategy may have made sense in the past when Economics in a college of arts and sciences was more of a theoretical field, but it is not optimal today. Because Applied Economics fields are not well represented in the Economics Department within Arts and Sciences, the external perception is often that Cornell as a university is weak in applied economics, while nothing could be further from the truth. Additionally, it may be the case that the staffing decisions of the economics department may be skewed by being made only with representation of a subset of the discipline. We have a concrete suggestion for addressing this issue discussed below.

We also note that some Arts and Sciences social sciences departments are currently stronger than others. None are top ten departments but economics seems to be in the most trouble. This said, we think that there is a real potential in all departments. There are many excellent faculty at Cornell, and no department is lacking potential to move up, though this may be harder in Economics given the highly competitive market in this field.

Success in the social sciences is attainable for Cornell, with significant effort, investment, and coordination, if addressed at this time. Failure to act now is likely to leave Cornell’s social sciences even further behind other top programs, with long term consequences for the quality of these programs and Cornell’s reputation as a whole. We should note that the Law School appears to be doing well. It continues to rank in or near the top 15 law schools. Its new hires include a number of PhD recipients, which indicates that Cornell Law is correcting what has been perceived by some to be a trend towards hiring too many practitioners and not enough pure academics. Dean Schwab noted that 8 of 35 faculty in the Law School have PhDs. In addition, several interdepartmental collaborations with the Law School (e.g., between the Law School and ILR and between the Law School and computer science) were mentioned throughout the day.

In our report we talk about strengthening the social sciences and we put forward some ideas as to how to accomplish this end. However, Cornell’s administrators, like all university
leaders, need to translate this general goal into more specific ends. For example, since resources are not infinite, should Cornell first attack Economics? Cornell’s economists are spread across the different colleges and there are pockets of strength in labor economics and development economics. Economics is critical for social science success. But it is also a department that finds itself, perhaps, in the most trouble and one of the hardest to fix by making strong new hires.

Thus, some, but perhaps not all of us, are convinced that Economics should become the centerpiece in a social science effort at Cornell. It may be that Cornell is simply not positioned to compete with the nation’s best Economics programs and there may be other areas where Cornell has a better chance of pulling ahead of the competition and becoming a leader. In addition, while Economics is a hot discipline today, that exports ideas to many other social sciences, will this be the case tomorrow? Most think so. But Cornell needs to decide where to invest its resources in the social sciences. Of course, none of these questions can be answered without a comprehensive internal and external review of the fields.

We give this as an illustration as well as a problem to approach. Once goals are elaborated and made more precise, strategies and resources need to be laid out.

If the goal is to improve the quality and reputation of the entire social sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences, instead of targeting one or two disciplines, the University might decide to spread its resources throughout its entire program in an attempt to increase immediately the profile of all of its social science departments and fields. But such broad-based, across-the-board changes may not produce the large-scale effects that Cornell needs to jump start its social sciences. And, it is expensive. A strategy targeted at one or two social science disciplines (with a hopeful trickle-down effect for others) would seem more efficacious. Because the greatness of any research university depends in large part on the stature of its arts and sciences programs, the College of Arts and Sciences has been chosen as the key location in which to strengthen the social sciences.
Cornell needs to decide if the social science departments in the College of Arts and Sciences are large enough. The only way to improve the talent level of the faculty is to add new faculty that are more talented than the current stock, either by reaching out to the external labor market or looking at Cornell faculty outside of Arts & Sciences. This can occur via two mechanisms: replacement hiring, or adding faculty lines to the departments. Replacement hiring is typically not problematic, so the key question here is, are the departments, especially Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Psychology, big enough in terms of faculty FTEs?

How to add faculty? Funds can be raised in a new campaign. Or, as discussed below, fractional appointments can be made with other schools. Or, lines can be reallocated across divisions and/or schools or across departments within the social sciences. Teaching demands need to be assessed. Since we know gross size of departments but we do not know the specifics of budgets, we do not give guidance here. However, allocating additional faculty lines to these core social science departments may be justified by:

1. the goal of improving their research profile, and hence the research reputation of Arts and Sciences and the University, and/or
2. data that show that the departments are understaffed relative to their contributions to college credits and degrees.

Thus, if the goal is to strengthen the social sciences at Cornell, then the University’s most immediate challenge is the creation of a coherent plan for achieving this end. Developing such a plan will require a thorough and critical assessment of each social science discipline at Cornell with the goal of determining where Cornell can most effectively commit resources to ensure greater efficiencies and a competitive advantage vis-à-vis peer institutions. This assessment would necessarily involve, at minimum, analyses of the quality of Cornell’s social science faculty in each department/field (e.g., examination of scholarly productivity, reputation, ability to secure external funding for peer-reviewed research,
teaching performance, and other contributions to Cornell’s research and educational mission). It would also involve assessment of social science departments at peer universities in an effort to determine where Cornell is best positioned to carve out a niche for itself and to distinguish its program from other social science programs.

**Current Issues**

We want to tell you what we heard and then offer you some promising paths.

(1) A lack of commitment to and support for the social sciences by university leaders. While applauding the appointment of David Harris as Vice-Provost for Social Sciences, several faculty expressed frustration at the seeming absence of support for social science at the highest levels of University administration. Particularly notable was the absence of social science representation in Day Hall (until recently) and in the Dean’s Office of the College of Arts and Sciences. There is a feeling that senior Cornell administrators see a humanities model for the social sciences. But the humanities are not a good model for the social sciences.

(2) A disaggregation and dispersion of resources, including faculty, within Cornell’s social sciences. This is especially striking given how many schools and centers there are at Cornell. Core departments are small but economists and sociologists are spread around colleges. This is less true for political scientists. Although the issue was not addressed in detail in the preliminary materials provided to the SSEAC, the Committee repeatedly heard complaints about the dispersion of resources in Cornell’s social science program. Faculty operating in particular disciplines (e.g., economics, sociology) are often scattered across the University in different departments. Cross-departmental collaboration is at times difficult (especially between endowed and contract units) and seemingly the exception rather than the rule. The division
between the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Human Ecology was specifically noted.

Perhaps the strengths in the social sciences at the Colleges at Cornell other than Arts and Sciences can be turned to better advantage. The “core” social science departments in the College of Arts and Sciences could make a series of fractional joint appointments from among the most productive faculty in schools outside Arts and Sciences at Cornell. These appointments would carry task responsibility commensurate with the fraction in each case and, importantly, would carry full departmental voting rights. In addition to immediately raising the profile of the social sciences at Cornell, this proposal will give the social sciences departments within Arts and Sciences more balance when it comes to deciding on future appointments. While this proposal does require some additional FTEs and will require careful attention to issues of morale and process, we feel it holds the promise of raising Cornell’s profile in the social sciences relatively rapidly and efficiently.

For example, if four faculty members who are economists in the ILR School each received a ¼ appointment in the Economics Department in Arts and Sciences, there would be an additional FTE in Economics and four new voting members of the Economics Department. Importantly, these new members would be perceived as members of the Economics Department at Cornell, and they would effectively raise Cornell’s reputation in economics. The ILR School would be able to hire a new faculty member with existing resources since 1 full FTE (4 x 1/4) would now be moved to the Economics Department. The addition of another labor economist at the ILR School would add vitality to labor economics in the ILR School. Furthermore, to help cement the bond between substantively related departments across Colleges, the search committee for the new labor economist in the ILR School should either include or, at a minimum, consult with economists from Arts and Sciences as well as from the other Colleges at Cornell. If this were repeated with appropriate members of
the faculty who are economists in other schools outside Arts and Sciences, the
Department of Economics in Arts and Sciences would have a broader representation
and context for decision making going forward.

As new appointments in the social sciences are made at Cornell, decisions regarding
joint appointments could be made on a case-by-case basis. There could be
collaborative searches or there could be ex-post arrangements. This will aid
recruiting because many hiring targets are likely to find an appointment in the core
disciplinary departments in Arts and Sciences an important inducement.

There are, of course, difficulties with implementing this suggestion. First, it requires
resources in the form of additional FTEs in Arts and Sciences. There is a substantial
“bang-for-the-buck” here since the newly-joint faculty will only transfer a fraction of
their time to Arts and Sciences but will be full voting members there. Second, it
requires effort on the parts of the other school to “replace” the faculty who now
devote some fraction of their time to Arts and Sciences. Third, there is likely to be
difficulty in the departments in Arts and Sciences in deciding to whom to offer joint
appointments and perhaps even in accepting the idea of joint appointments. This may
be because of a perception of lack of control and because of lack of familiarity with
the subfields in which the potential joint appointments work. It is likely to require
some participation outside the Arts and Sciences to make these appointments
effectively. Fourth, there are likely to be some morale issues in the Colleges from
which the joint appointments come due to the fact that not all faculty there will be
offered joint appointments. We believe these problems are transitional as the initial
resistance to change is overcome and the new “normal” way of doing business takes
hold. Fifth, recruiting new faculty takes time; while converting some current faculty
to joint appointments will have an immediate impact.
In summary, we believe that this suggestion, while not simple and perhaps not applicable to every department, holds considerable promise for raising the quality and reputation of the social sciences at Cornell. It deserves serious consideration.

(3) A failure to recruit and retain quality faculty due, in part, to an unwillingness to offer competitive recruitment packages. Nothing will work to hire and retain quality faculty if you are not competitive and “in the market.” This is a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition to get stronger. It is necessary to achieve ends and to “signal” outside Cornell.

The Committee heard from multiple sources that in some cases Cornell has been unsuccessful in recruiting and retaining scholars due to an unwillingness of certain Deans to offer competitive salary and research packages. This reluctance may be due, in part, to a lack of understanding of market pressures (e.g., the going rate for top economists) and, in part, to an unwillingness to have salary disparities within departments or across schools. The report we received mentioned a culture of egalitarianism. This culture will not help recruitment! If Cornell is to compete for and retain the best and brightest scholars, it must at minimum offer competitive salaries and research packages to recruits and reward its most productive scholars by ensuring that their compensation and research packages keep pace with market forces. This is true at both the senior and junior level.

The Committee was also told that University priorities and departmental hiring practices are not always aligned. Clearly, this divergence must be addressed both in the development and implementation of any plan to revamp Cornell’s social sciences. The social science fields seem divorced from strategic planning.

Dual career concerns will continue to plague Cornell because of its location. This is an issue without an easy solution.
We will expand on recruitment and retention later.

(4) A culture that in some instances lacks sufficient incentives to encourage faculty initiative and entrepreneurial behavior (e.g., solicitation of external funding for research). There were complaints, many of which we have heard in our own universities, concerning teaching buyout and graduate student costs and training/infrastructure issues. The Committee repeatedly heard concerns about (1) a lack of University support for “big social science,” (2) disincentives to securing external funding and to engaging in other entrepreneurial activities, and (3) inadequate training and funding of graduate research assistants. A University policy permitting the buyout of some teaching time would seem to create the right kind of incentives (and would also help with faculty recruitment and retention efforts). In addition, continued consideration of the ways in which GRAs are funded and trained and the ways in which University resources are (or are not) deployed to support the social sciences is desirable (e.g., the use and organization of centers and support services, the flat-rate (15%) taxing of grants in the contract colleges, the absence of training grants and programs across Cornell social science, indirect allocations, etc.). As an aside, we thought the Dean of Human Ecology, Lisa Staiano-Coico, has introduced many good incentives.

**More Solutions**

**Recruiting and Retention**

We have already noted some recruitment issues. Recruitment and retention are at the heart of success for the social sciences (and, of course, other divisions). Reputation rests on faculty, strong graduate students, placement of those students, publication rates, and success in the market place for sponsored research and the fruit of such research.
As we have noted, the prominence of the social sciences will be most greatly affected by the prominence of the social science departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. Recruitment strategies should focus on these units without compromising Cornell’s strength in the social sciences in the other Colleges. These strategies should feature both external recruitment of new faculty and joint appointments for current outstanding faculty in other social science departments on campus.

There is no hope of improving the social sciences in Arts and Sciences unless college and university administrators are willing to offer competitive salaries to recruit the best faculty. Offering market rates in recruiting talent at all ranks has two effects:

1. it improves the chances of actually hiring the best faculty;
2. it shows competing departments and institutions that the departments at Cornell are “major players” to be reckoned with.

Both factors help improve reputation.

Paying market rates is relatively easy: find out what departments at “peer” institutions are offering as starting salaries, and match it. There’s nothing to decide because the market has set the price of talent, and justifying paying salaries that are, on the face of it, frequently hard to swallow, is easy: the market made me do it. The fact that Cornell is located in a lower-price area is largely irrelevant, especially because potential recruits in many fields will likely consider the middling quality of the social science departments at Cornell a factor that necessitates a higher that market-level salary to attract them to Cornell. Paying market rates will increase inequality, but will not necessarily increase inequity. Faculty and administrators frequently err in identifying cases of “inequity” because they compare the higher salaries and fewer accomplishments of early career recruits to the lower (or not much higher) salaries and greater accomplishments of later career faculty. What this kind of comparison fails to consider is that early career recruits are being paid for their futures, not their past, and their futures may, indeed should, show greater research potential than the futures of mid- or late-career faculty.
Retention is just a special case of recruitment, and so the same rule applies: pay market rates. Salary offers to current faculty from peer institutions should be routinely met with a matching salary offer, unless it is desired that the faculty person leaves.

Salary is not the only important form of compensation. As noted in the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Science Recruitment and Retention, creating more time for research by reducing teaching loads is another important mechanism for rewarding highly productive faculty. The college should be ready to offer reduced teaching loads, or course credits, to faculty as a response to competing offers that include same. In most cases, such reductions would be temporary or limited; although at major universities it is not unusual to find that the most eminent researchers in departments have permanently reduced teaching loads.

Recruitment is largely about procuring rich and promising future research careers, and, other things equal, the longer the futures, the better. There is no formula based on age. Some social scientists stop producing graduate students and research at an early age and others continue long past retirement. We recommend that consideration be given to scholars who will contribute to Cornell by producing influential research, add collegiality and vitality to their departments, and train top graduate students. Simply adding names of well-known scholars who are not on campus very much and are not training Cornell graduate students will not improve Cornell’s reputation.

To raise Cornell social science departments into the top 10, Cornell will have to recruit new faculty from peer institutions. To accomplish upward mobility in the rankings most quickly, a focus of this recruitment effort should be on faculty already at top ranked departments. Within those departments, Cornell recruitment should focus on those in the top half of the existing faculty. Hunting for under-placed junior faculty is another strategy.
Recruitment of top faculty can address many concerns, increasing the visibility of areas, bringing new externally funded projects, and providing a new flow of indirect cost recovery (IDC) to pay for costly infrastructure. However, recruitment of top faculty from top departments at other universities will require Cornell to abandon within-college and within-department equity norms. To move top people from outstanding departments Cornell must pay incentives to move (somewhat above current market costs) which may create inequity. And, even then, moving senior people is difficult. Thus, as the internal reports note, cluster hiring needs to be explored. Furthermore, strong junior hiring also needs to occur.

The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Sciences Recruitment and Retention suggests a cluster hiring initiative along the lines of recent efforts at NYU, Columbia, and Wisconsin. Hiring a bunch of faculty at once rather than one-at-a-time definitely has an impact on reputation, but the NYU and Columbia models are different from the Wisconsin model. The two privates hired a bunch of faculty in one department at roughly the same time; Wisconsin hired faculty in different departments.

The model of the privates may yield more and faster improvements in the reputations of social sciences at Cornell. This effect on reputation might be augmented if the hires were not only in the same department, but in roughly the same area. This might help a department establish a “flagship enterprise” by which it becomes known to the rest of the discipline, much like industrial organization in the Northwestern Economics department, econometrics in the UCSD Economics Department and stratification and family demography in the Wisconsin Sociology department.

If Cornell wants to do “cluster” hiring, development economics would make a lot of sense for three reasons. First, while MIT, Princeton, Harvard and Chicago are the leaders in development economics, it is not clear who follows them. In addition, each of these schools have no more than two or three leading development economists. It would not take many new hires to quickly raise Cornell’s stature in development economics. Second, probably no
field in economics has as much potential to do good for the world as development economics. And third, Cornell already has strengths in development in the economics dept. (e.g. Kaushik Basu) and outside of it (Gary Fields, Christopher Barrett).

Cornell may wish to re-examine current hiring practices in the context of recruitment efforts. For example, the practice of seeking external letters of evaluation for star senior hires only after writing the terms of a recruitment package may be more appropriate to departments already ranked at the top of their field than to departments ranked somewhat lower. When hiring for moderately ranked departments external letters can be a valuable source of information about the likely contributions of a potential new faculty member that can be used to guide investments in recruitment packages. Retention efforts should focus on Cornell social science faculty currently in the top half, by productivity, of their department and being recruited by more highly ranked departments. In this situation Cornell should match outside offers dollar for dollar at the minimum.

External Funding

Externally funded grants, especially from rigorously peer reviewed sources such as NIH and NSF, can greatly increase the visibility and reputation of Cornell social scientists. In addition to the dollars that pay the costs of innovative research, peer review of these project proposals by the nation’s leading scientists will help to significantly enhance the reputation of Cornell researchers. Moreover, many of the nation’s most prominent social scientists (as evidenced by membership in the national academy of sciences) require this type of funding in order to make their innovative and important contributions. Failure to embrace this type of scientific work will make it impossible to recruit such scientists.

To increase the incentives for current faculty to pursue externally funded grants, and increase the attractiveness of Cornell for external hires with grants, Cornell will need to make key organizational changes:
1) There must be course “buy out” (release from teaching) available at known and predictable costs to researchers with grants. The more attractive the terms of this release from teaching the more attractive Cornell will be to external faculty with grants. Note that if this policy is not affordable under current circumstances, it can be created by increasing the normal course load for faculty without grants. Such a change may motivate non-grant active faculty to become grant active.

2) A range of rules for “pricing” courses are given in the appendix of the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Sciences Recruitment and Retention. Arts and Sciences should adopt one. For departments with four-course loads, a reasonable calculation figures each course is worth 20% of faculty effort, with the remaining 20% accounted for by service/research. This would suggest that faculty can buy out of one course by moving 20% of their annual salary (plus fringes) to a grant. Buying out of a full semester might call for moving 50% of annual salary to an external source.

3) The rate of buy outs will vary across departments, with the percentage of faculty salaries off budget highest in Psychology and Sociology, lowest in Political Science and Economics, although it depends on the research composition of the departments.

4) At universities where social science is “big”, it may be typical to find 20-25% of the faculty salary commitment of the college in the social sciences is actually paid by grants. Hence, Arts and Sciences can achieve substantial savings by allowing faculty to buy out.

5) Some savings to the college will be lost because replacement lecturers may be needed to back fill for faculty who go off budget. But not every course bought out needs to be replaced. It may be enough to replace one course for every 2-3 that is bought out. Indeed, the college and department chairs should make an effort to minimize the number of replacement lecturers that are needed by concentrating buyout among less central courses.

6) The college may wish to “invest” some of the buyout savings in the hiring of additional faculty. For example, if Sociology faculty were to buy out of 20% of their
courses every year, then it would be feasible to increase the size of the sociology faculty FTE by 10% without increasing the overall departmental faculty salary budget. This is another incentive for departments to seek external funding – they can grow their faculty.

7) There must be a return of at least some indirect costs (IDC) to the principal investigator of the grant and the lowest level administrative unit responsible for administering the grant activities. This is absolutely necessary to provide the support services needed to administer existing grants, submit proposals for new grants, and implement research activities required for the grant activity. The greater the return of the IDC funds, the more likely grant-based social science is to flourish at Cornell. Note that if this policy is not affordable under current circumstances, it can be created by identifying a “floor” level of IDC (such as the level of IDC this year) and then returning all new IDC above the “floor” level (all IDC raised in future years that is above the level of the current year).

Cornell might also consider providing additional support (financial and substantive) for grant writing activity by:

1) Establishing a series of workshops within each College for helping faculty write grants. Acceptance to participate in a workshop would be on a competitive, peer-reviewed basis. In exchange for agreeing to prepare a grant proposal, faculty would be offered a summer stipend and the opportunity to receive feedback from others in the workshop who shared similar substantive interests.

2) Creating a high level administrative position (e.g. Director of Research) within each of the Colleges whose responsibilities would be to review current external funding opportunities relevant to the faculty within that College and to notify faculty of such opportunities on a regular basis. NYU’s Steinhardt School of Education does this.
Graduate Student Involvement in Research

Increasing the affordability of graduate student labor to funded research projects is desirable. Faculty would benefit from more affordable research assistance and graduate students would benefit from greater involvement in externally funded research. Substantial reduction of the tuition costs charged to research grants for graduate students at the ABD level, who are no longer engaged in course work, deserves high priority.

However, along with tuition reduction, faculty should be given greater incentives to pursue externally funded training grants. University and college based taxation of IDC should be waived on all training grants that cover portions of the tuition costs. These grants generally carry low IDC, usually insufficient to pay the actual administrative costs of the grant. Instead, the University should consider finding ways to subsidize the administrative costs of training grants.

Likewise, faculty should be encouraged to involve the most highly skilled and capable undergraduate students in their research. This alternative pool of research assistance is more affordable, and undergraduate involvement in social research can greatly enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience.

To provide for adequate training of graduate students in research methods, the Vice Provost for the Social Sciences should establish a University-wide committee on research methods to catalog all research methods courses offered currently at Cornell with details regarding prerequisites, audience, semesters/years given, content emphasized (e.g., health, business, education, and so on). We can provide lists of applied statistics courses offered by NYU and UCLA, including such details. They may provide a possible framework for cataloguing such courses at Cornell to identify duplicates and omissions.
Research Centers

Research centers may provide a strong mechanism for recruitment and retention incentives, stimulating externally funded grant activity, and providing the infrastructure needed to conduct both small and large scale social research. Such centers can be funded through some combination of capital campaign and return of IDC funds on grants directly administered by the centers.

While some centers are generally viewed favorably, the proliferation of centers and institutes in some cases has drained departmental resources. It is not completely clear how the field system works and where decision making is located. This lack of a coherent organizational structure leads to confusion internally and externally, making operational efficiencies difficult to obtain and successful marketing of Cornell’s social science program a near impossibility. The myriad quantity of pamphlets we received was striking to us.

Cornell’s current proliferation of social science research centers and institutes reduces their effectiveness in promoting social science research on campus may detract from their visibility to the external research community. Small, within-department research centers may be inefficient, making Cornell investments in social science infrastructure unnecessarily diffuse. Combining existing centers and institutes into a smaller number of larger centers might be beneficial. If this is not possible across Colleges, then consideration of a single center within each College coordinated by a single institute across Colleges may provide a useful alternative. We note that it is possible that small centers are helpful for retention and cheap. Maybe competition among small centers is beneficial. We are not sure we know enough to be certain here.

Integration of existing infrastructure centers, such as CISER and SRI, into centers that act as the administrative home for externally funded research grants may have many benefits
but we do not know whether this is feasible. Such integration might more closely coordinate
the provision of social research infrastructure with the needs of research projects. Second,
return of IDC funds for these infrastructure units could be done through a single coordinating
center to achieve higher efficiency and better services. Centers acting as the administrative
home for research projects often have the greatest incentives to provide needed infrastructure
efficiently. Third, organizing both project administration and infrastructure within the same
center maximizes the opportunity to design new, cutting edge infrastructure in the
development of new research proposals.

Finally, such centers could be used as part of an aggressive recruitment strategy. Just
as it may be appropriate for some social scientists to hold fractional appointments in more
than one college, it may also be appropriate for social scientists engaged in large scale, long
term, externally funded research projects to hold fractional appointments in research centers.
These fractions of their appointments could be covered through some combination of Center
funds (capital campaign and IDC) and researchers’ own direct costs funds. This appointment
strategy can be used to increase the total number of lines available from external recruitment,
create release for teaching for grant active faculty without changing the terms of teaching for
non-grant active faculty, and facilitate the flow of IDC return to investigators successful at
raising external funds for research.

High Priority Immediate Investment Opportunity

Investment in efforts to bring an NICHD funded R24 Infrastructure Center to Cornell
should be a high priority. These centers are explicitly designed to support the research of
health economists, labor economists, developmental psychologists, and sociologists in many
specific areas. Cornell is strong in these areas – continued faculty recruitment in these areas
and investment in a proposal for an NICHD R24 Infrastructure Center are likely to be part of
a successful effort to push Cornell social sciences into the top ten. Many of the components
needed to succeed in obtaining such a center are already in place. This success will quickly
raise the visibility of Cornell social sciences and help to provide much needed social science research infrastructure.

Additional Note

The Committee, as a group, did not take up diversity issues. However, although the SSEAC did not probe these issues, the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Sciences Faculty Recruitment and Retention noted a problem with gender equality (specifically a perceived hostile working environment for women) at Cornell. One faculty member with whom one of us spoke after one of the larger sessions said that it would be difficult to discuss this issue with SSEAC in the presence of Deans and Department heads. Problems of sexism apparently continue to exist and we hope that Cornell will continue to investigate and address these concerns.

Conclusion

Neither a physical science/life science model nor a humanities model is ideal for the social sciences. The social sciences require their own model. However, the life sciences emphasis on teamwork, data creation infrastructure, and pursuit of external funding comes closer to what is needed for the social sciences than a humanities based model.

The University has already made a number of solid recommendations for change (e.g., cluster hiring, elimination of graduate research assistant tuition, teaching buyout, greater attention to trailing spouse difficulties, etc.). While helpful in identifying existing problems and some potential solutions, the recommendations were insufficiently tailored to an overarching plan or vision for improving Cornell’s social science program, and as one Committee member noted, they were somewhat “boilerplate.” Because the efficacy of any of these recommendations is unclear without an articulation and understanding of Cornell’s
specific plan for improvement, each recommendation should be reviewed after a comprehensive assessment of the field has been completed. In short, at the appropriate time, each recommendation should be reevaluated with an eye to determining whether it furthers Cornell’s strategic plan.

If Cornell decides to invest heavily in improving one department (e.g., economics), then cluster hiring (along the lines of what NYU and Columbia have done) may or may not be efficient and effective. Similarly, if Cornell decides to boost the profile of various social science departments simultaneously, then cluster hiring across disciplines may make sense. The utility of cluster hiring will depend upon the specific goals being pursued, the “recruitability” of potential targets, and the commitment of those targets to institution building. Immediately embarking upon cluster hiring, without a clear plan, is undesirable as it will likely replicate existing problems. In addition, as one Committee member noted, the University must carefully consider salary pressures created throughout the University by the hiring of several high profile, social science scholars given the size of Cornell’s endowment. We should note, however, that social scientists don’t require the laboratory and start up packages that many physical scientists require, so their total costs may be comparatively lower than suggested by their salaries alone.

We have not addressed budget and finance issues. However, to underscore the critical importance of the social sciences and the role it plays in contributing to the reputation and influence of a major research university such as Cornell, the social sciences, in their many facets, should be featured prominently in Cornell’s soon to be announced capital campaign. Revenues from the campaign can be used to jumpstart and even sustain many of the initiatives suggested in this report, including the strategic recruitment, hiring, and retention of faculty who can tackle collectively many of today’s complex and intriguing societal problems. A campaign focus on the social sciences also should help counter the perception among Cornell’s current social scientists that the University, to date does not value this important field of study.
This is an exciting time for Cornell University. With a new President, an enthusiastic Provost and ViceProvost, and a new capital campaign on the horizon, we have every hope that the revamping of Cornell’s social science program will be successful.