

University of Washington

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SUBJECT: UIF Three-Year Review of the Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities

I. Summary Recommendation

The Simpson Center has established itself nationally as a place for innovative public scholarship and as an ambitious home for interdisciplinary humanities programming in a very short time, with the most impressive leaps taken within the last eighteen months. The UIF has been a crucial mechanism for fostering successful institutional innovation in the case of the Simpson Center. Permanent UIF support for the Simpson Center is warranted, fully deserved and required for the Simpson Center to achieve sustainability as well as long range goals.

II. Specific Recommendations

The gestation period of the Simpson Center has been long and complicated. This commitment by a diverse group of people shows in the quality of the result. The working relationships among everyone involved were high-minded and productive and everyone—former directors, task force members, advisory board members, staff, faculty and graduate students—look back happily at the intricate evolution of the Simpson Center. Throughout, the former directors have acted without hidden agendas, with generosity toward one another and for the common good of the University.

The Simpson Center enjoys superb new leadership in its faculty director, Kathleen Woodward, a wonderful staff, successful research and public programs, excellent facilities, and most importantly, broad faculty and administrative support. In a short time it has effected a broadly felt change among humanities faculty. It has raised morale, fostered a new sense of community, expanded horizons, convinced faculty that they have a real ownership in a shared humanities laboratory, and mounted a broad array of research, curricular, and public programs. Department chairs report that the Simpson Center has become a real asset in recruiting new faculty and they believe that it will make

a difference in faculty retention. Community and public partners of the University are unanimous in their excitement at the outcomes of their collaborations, in their belief that the Simpson Center is making a powerful contribution to the region's educational and cultural life, and in their conviction that, in turn, their community organizations bring invaluable resources to the Simpson Center and to the University as a whole.

The Simpson Center's endowment is critical to its future but cannot sustain the Simpson Center's capacious program of research and creative activity in the humanities and related fields. The combination of UIF funds, the endowment, and grants funding have made the Simpson Center a real resource within the College, within the University, and, increasingly, within the region and nationally. The combination of permanent UIF funding and the Simpson Center's endowment, combined with grants and strategic partnerships, gives the Simpson Center the ability to leverage other funding opportunities, stability to continue its core programs and flexibility needed for opportunistic innovation. However, the UIF and the current endowment alone are not sufficient to create the conditions for a permanently flourishing creative and scholarly environment in the cultural disciplines institution-wide.

1. The Office of Research and other internal sources of support remain critical to the enterprise. Permanent UIF funding of the Simpson Center should be the occasion for a systematic examination of the support for creative activity and scholarship in the humanities and arts, through the Royalty Research Fund and other internal sources.

The Simpson Center is a powerful integrating force that brings together humanities research, teaching, and public engagement in innovative ways. It should be the granting agency for fellowships and projects that serve its specific missions. But it cannot and should not be viewed as the major source of support for all scholarly and creative activity in the humanities. The University needs to investigate what portion of humanists' scholarly needs coincide with the mission of the Simpson Center, and what portion is the responsibility of the research office, the graduate school, and other units.

The Office of Research should complement the support available through the Simpson Center by continuing to invest substantially in the humanities through appropriate discretionary fund programs for individual and collaborative work. The Royalty Research Fund and other programs need to be thoughtfully integrated, in an ongoing way, to provide maximum benefits to humanities and arts faculty. The conversation between the Director of the Simpson Center and the Vice Provost for Research will be a crucial part of this process.

2. The University should consider taking the following specific steps:
 - A .5 faculty associate vice provost position in the arts and humanities added to the research office, rotating every three years, charged with overseeing arts and humanities support for individual and collaborative work.

- Exploratory meetings bringing together the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Divisional Dean for the Arts and Humanities, humanities faculty, and department chairs, and the Vice Provost for Research.
3. The Simpson Center cannot fund all humanities research. We agree with the Simpson Center's recent decision not to fund research travel and to turn down requests that should be funded by other units or that have minimal pay-off for the Simpson Center. This new clarity of purpose is important in the aftermath of a period of several Acting Directors, during which almost all requests were funded at some level.
 4. The Simpson Center's curricular mission needs to be better focused. The role of the Forum for the Curriculum (i.e. the curriculum committee) relative to the group of faculty actively engaged in teaching courses funded by or associated with the Simpson Center is not entirely clear. Also, we recommend that community partners, when appropriate, be eligible for funding as team teachers.
 5. We recommend a strategic partnership between the Simpson Center and the Vice President for University Relations designed to strengthen the Simpson Center's public and community initiatives and the Vice President's relationship to humanities and arts faculty and students. In consultation with the Vice President for University Relations, a community advisory board or board of trustees should be formed.
 6. We recommend that the Simpson Center continue to expand its collaborative programs with units outside of the College of Arts and Science. To date, they have collaborated with Law, Architecture and Urban Planning, and Medicine. Future partners should include the College of Education and the Evans School of Public Affairs.
 7. While the Simpson Center appears to have a strong commitment to the University's diversity mission, this commitment could be more programmatic and explicit, for example, as a funding criteria.
 8. The Simpson Center's growing publication program is excellent. It should be part of a well-designed communications and marketing initiative that includes web-based communications, scholarly publications of the kind already underway, and also publications or web features aimed at non-academic audiences. The University is part of Internet II, which offers a platform for long-distance collaborations on master classes, on-line exhibits, interactive conferencing. (There is a staff person at the national Internet II office charged with developing arts and humanities programming.) Technology should not drive the communications initiative, but the Simpson Center has a strong claim on the University's information technology. Indeed, working with programs in art, music, design, and the School of Information and Library Science can push technology to serve cultural work and cultural networks in new ways.
 9. The Simpson Center should continue its excellent work on behalf of graduate students (the internship at University of Washington Press, for example), emphasizing broad communications, administrative, and collaborative skills. The Simpson Center should

keep looking for new ways to empower and fund graduate students. This could proceed in several ways: through a grant program for graduate student's small-scale campus-community projects (along the lines of Woodrow Wilson's Humanities at Work Practicum Program), hiring graduate students to work as members of projects closely related to their research, or using the Simpson Center as a platform for new kinds of graduate courses, particularly those that give graduate students the chance to work in community arenas.

10. A strong development plan is indispensable. The Simpson Center's leadership has sound plans for moving forward aggressively in this area, aiming at raising another \$5 million over the next five years, but it will need strong backing from the College of Arts and Sciences and from University's Office of Development to succeed.
11. The Simpson Center needs an executive committee or another body for policy-making functions in addition to the current advisory board, which is essentially a proposal review committee.
12. The Simpson Center has several curricular endeavors underway. Undergraduates and graduate students are extremely well served by the Simpson Center. Indeed, the Simpson Center stands out nationally for its imaginative commitment to undergraduate teaching.

All of the Simpson Center's curricular programs can boast real successes. Curricular initiatives include the Forum on the Curriculum (a committee), faculty generating new interdisciplinary courses (individually and team taught) through funded proposals, and courses taught through the Simpson Center with its course number.

The situation needs simplifying. Some key questions should be addressed soon: Should the Simpson Center's course offerings consist only of funded proposals? What is the rationale for continuing the Simpson Center's own course offerings? There is a real need for "gateway" courses in the humanities that tap humanities faculty in large and small departments to draw undergraduates into many areas of humanistic study. In light of this, should the Simpson Center support only team-taught courses, on the argument that team teaching is the hardest thing for individual departments to support? These questions should be resolved in AY 2000-2001 so that the excellent curricular achievements of the Simpson Center can go forward.

The Forum on the Curriculum—a misnomer—is really a curriculum committee. The Forum has had some difficulty defining its role in the Simpson Center, and this is true, to some extent, of the curricular enterprise there as a whole. Many terrific things are happening, but the relationship of one undertaking to another and the role of the Forum in particular need some rethinking. A former director noted that the Forum "might not be the best model" for curricular enterprise. A smaller task force would better fulfill the Simpson Center's self-assessment and policy-making in this area.

The Forum put on an excellent panel last spring, an invitational event where faculty presented their experiences with different models of team teaching in courses offered through or funded by the Simpson Center. This event should be repeated annually.

III. Overview

Normally assistant professors concentrate primarily on research and publishing with little other focus than to be promoted and tenured. The Simpson Center supports a program of involvement difficult for single academic departments to fund. As a result, assistant professors are pursuing research collaborations, civic engagement, and entrepreneurship much earlier in the professional life cycle than previously. In an interview with junior faculty, Assistant Professor of English Anne Curzan said, “I am hosting an international conference. [The Simpson Center has] helped me think about how to organize it, how to bring in other departments, how to publicize the conference, how to put the scholarly community here in touch with an international community.” Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature Jennifer Bean added, “In the current market, with many faculty leaving the University for positions elsewhere, there’s a sense of the community getting torn asunder. Without [the Simpson Center], what would it be like emotionally, psychologically, pragmatically for junior faculty? The [Simpson Center] is a separate space from your department, where these losses occur. We share a community [that is] forging an experience.”

For junior faculty the collaborative environment of the Simpson Center is a natural extension of the Faculty Fellows orientation program for new faculty and faculty new to the Seattle area, particularly for junior faculty in small departments or departments with few junior faculty. Christine Goettler, Assistant Professor of Art History, noted, “The Society of Fellows in my second year here opened up a lot—a space to communicate within the University, to engage in projects outside the university. And they fed us lunch every other week.”

As faculty members develop through the associate and full professor ranks, they are looking for opportunities to reinvent themselves. Humanists (and possibly faculty in all disciplines) increasingly look on their careers as structured by periodic changes of direction and transformation. These moments of reinvention can take the form of moving into new areas of scholarship, teaching, and public engagement. Increasingly, mid- and late-career faculty are catalyzed by commitments to public and community engagement, writing for a broader audiences, addressing new research areas and problems, and exploring the potential of new information technologies.

Former Simpson Center Director Leroy Searle said, “In the natural sciences and social sciences and health care, the focus *is* the research group. This is much more difficult to do in the humanities and arts, where the tradition is different. To get the equivalent effect requires a lot of cunning and a lot of time. It’s a little bit like trying to orchestrate the ocean. There are impediments to igniting new work and a new faculty research culture in the humanities; the problems are deeply impacted. The first three years have been really experimental. But the Simpson Center can build on a long tradition of bottom-up

entrepreneurship by UW faculty and on programs such as the College Studies major, Faculty Fellows, the Curriculum Transformation Project, among others. The fact that the Simpson Center is now available makes a huge difference.”

The Simpson Center enhances and supports these professional turning points and serves as a shared laboratory and home for faculty at these critical moments in their careers. As such, it can channel the energy of individual change into institutional change. As the mission of the University alters its course in response to social changes, humanities research responds nimbly with new cultural work. This dynamic relationship has also formed the design of the Simpson Center beyond the “eighties model” of an academic humanities Simpson Center. That model included support for faculty fellows and individual scholarly projects, hosting interdisciplinary conferences, some support for graduate students, and a publications program, as well as some curricular offerings.

An updated model for a humanities Simpson Center emphasizes strategic partnerships with other units and organizations (i.e. Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life and the Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Simpson Centers) and emphasizes collaborative work by multigenerational project teams of undergraduates, graduate students, faculty at all ranks, university staff, and public and community partners.

In her statement about the Univer+City Colloquium held in November 1999, Professor Diana Behler, former Acting Director of the Simpson Center, described the focus of Univer+City as “the university’s role in the public sphere, the idea of the educated citizen, and the aesthetic education of a community through shared learning. The mutual obligation of the city and the university to engage the arts and humanities in forging public policy and civic identity, and to develop ways to enliven our communities through collaborative partnerships.” In other words, collaborative work includes projects designed to yield a “public good.” Public goods include educational programs like the Clemente Course, Teachers as Scholars, and the Wednesday University; they also potentially could include curricular materials, web resources for public and community use, contributions to museum exhibits, performances, oral histories, public art, and historic preservation.

The Simpson Center is most unique for its commitment to public and civic engagement and to inventing the emerging practices of public scholarship. The greater challenge however, is to integrate public engagement with innovative teaching, highly visible conferences, collaborative and individual projects, and a high-caliber publications program. Simpson Center Director Kathleen Woodward noted, “The distinction here really is the public scholarship. Success will mean that we can be known as a campus where public scholarship is an important value, our graduate students can leave with that expertise, and we can attract faculty with a strong interest in engagement. A certificate program in public scholarship would be fabulous.”

IV. Facts and Figures

- The Simpson Center has given out over 100 grants to faculty and 19 grants to departments to date.
- Almost 200 undergraduate students and 100 graduate students were enrolled in classes that were sponsored by the Simpson Center.
- 200 teachers from 11 school districts participated in The Teachers as Scholars Program.
- 42 faculty have participated in the Society of Scholars to date.
- The Wednesday University reached 2300 people in 5 courses to date.
- The Seattle Humanities Forum reached 1,000 people.

Achievements to Date

- Articulating a defining vision: integrated vision of the faculty career, multigenerational collaborations, public scholarship leading to substantial “public goods,” Simpson Center visibility, intellectual community-building
- Many programs linked by a common commitment to integrating scholarship, teaching, and community engagement. Different programs weight these components differently.
- Creating stable infrastructure: administrative and budget structures, hiring of excellent permanent staff and outstanding faculty director, facilities renovation, development initiative, communications and publishing

High Points

- Society of Scholars: support for individual research funded while faculty are connected through a multigenerational research community meeting biweekly for work-in-progress presentations and critique
- Wednesday University: 400 signed up for three courses in three quarters
- Teachers As Scholars
- Humanities 200: “Philosophy for Children”
- Clemente Course
- The Human Genomics Collaboration: Henry Gallery exhibit, public forums, medical school course, partnership with Berkeley Museum of Art