To the RSHA Restructure Steering Committee,

The School of Cultural Inquiry welcomes the opportunity to consider the future of the Humanities at ANU. In particular, we welcome the chance to identify structures that would, over the longer term, develop capacity and facilitate achievement in education, research and external funding. As Interim Head of Cultural Inquiry, I address issues that transcend the constituent disciplines, each of which has made an independent submission. Firstly, I consider the current position of SCI; I then identify conditions that would facilitate a successful merger and set up Humanities at ANU for a vital future.

Successes in SCI

Presently, SCI is functioning efficiently and harmoniously, despite the uncertainties caused by the restructure proposal. Student enrolments are up significantly this semester, student satisfaction with SCI courses and teaching, as quantified through SELT evaluations, remains high (amongst the highest in CASS), a lunch held this week for prospective honours in English attracted 35 students, and SCI enrolled 17 new PhD students this year, including 1 IPRS student, with a total load of approximately 60 HDR students.

Recently, a staff member and a PhD student in Creative Writing both published first novels that have attracted media attention. Earlier this year SCI celebrated the launch of five books in Classics and Ancient History, and two staff members in English have published books in 2013. Several staff are currently working on book manuscripts and are being mentored by senior staff. There are several active reading groups involving staff and graduate students, and in Classics and Ancient History, members of the community. The admin staff are working well and providing much appreciated support despite the recent resignation of the SSA. These successes have been achieved in a climate in which change rather than stability has been the one constant, with an impact on staff workload (i.e. emails, meetings, submissions, working parties).

Background

SCI was reviewed three years ago. The August 2010 review identified Art History, Classics and English as the three ‘pillars’ of the school, and recommended that the smaller fields – drama, film and new media, and gender, sexuality and culture, be attached to a pillar. In the subsequent two years, SCI experienced an unsettled period due in part to uncertainties regarding the future of drama, film, and gender given the ‘three pillars’ policy. The indeterminate status of these fields caused loss of morale and anxiety for some staff, resulting in staff losses. In 2010, there were 7 staff
in these fields; at the end of 2014, there will be 3. The loss or impending loss of staff has heightened uncertainty concerning the future of these fields.

Decline in Undergraduate Load in SCI

The RSHA restructure proposal cites a ‘decline in undergraduate load within SCI’ as one of the reasons for disestablishing the school. How significant is the decline in undergraduate load in SCI and to what can it be attributed?

The Student enrolment figures for disciplines in SCI, as shown in the RSHA proposal document, are based on data from April this year, and are offered with the caveat that enrolments can fluctuate until week 3. The numbers suggest a sharp downward trend in 2013. The story, however, is more complex. For the five years from 2009 to 2013, 2012 represents a peak in student enrolments. In fact, however, numbers were unusually high in Sem 1, 2012 (that is, a statistical blip rather than an indicator of a trend), and trended downward in Sem 2, 2012 and further downward in Sem 1, 2013. In Sem 2, 2013, enrolments are trending upwards again, and are now higher than they were in Sem 1, 2013 – which is unusual. As of Aug 2, there are over 200 more enrolments than were projected in April of this year.

Analysis of the load by discipline within SCI is revealing. Around 2/3 of the fall in load in 2013 stems from falls in drama, film, and GSC, rather than in English, Art History or Classics. These figures must be interpreted with care, as some of the apparent ‘fall’ has resulted from SCI being credited with a larger share of gender enrolments than is usual. Gender numbers in SCI were high in 2012 because SCI was mistakenly credited with a course taught by a sociology staff member, and because SCI staff taught both first year GEND units, one of which is usually taught in sociology. In addition, a Gender staff member resigned in 2012, reducing GEND offerings in 2013. Nonetheless, in 2013, both first year GEND units have strong enrolments.

This semester, due to need to reduce excess LSL, only one film course is on offer, and as of 2015, there will be only one staff member remaining in film. (While our Film major will, from 2014, be replaced by a minor, Sydney Univ. currently has 700 students enrolled in first year film.) In 2012, the drama major and minor were disestablished, with a resulting loss of courses. In short, a significant portion of the decline in load is linked to staff losses that have already occurred or are impending. Loss of staff and courses leads to rumours that film and GSC are being ‘disestablished’, which leads to further decline.

The smaller fields of film, gender, and drama must be rebuilt. Three staff in English, one recently appointed, have strong interest in Drama, and have plans to rebuild it. Staff originally from SLS have developed and sustained Film over the past 20 years. One staff in SLS currently offers a gender course, and there is a possibility that another gender course could be developed. Thus, merging with SLS will reignite some older synergies and facilitate some new synergies amongst staff with interests in film and gender. These synergies will not, however, enable majors and minors to thrive and grow without new appointments who can cover core teaching (see separate submissions from film and gender staff).

Preparing for the Future

SCI welcomes the opportunity to build and participate in an active research environment, whether in SCI or in a merged School of Languages and Literatures. There have been promising
developments in SCI in the last 18 months: for instance, there is an active ‘theory’ reading group that meets twice a month and includes one or more members from SCI, SLS, HRC, UCAN, ADFA. There is a staff/postgraduate group in Feminist/Queer theory that has been meeting regularly this year. Members of SCI have active research networks across ANU (for instance, within the Law and Humanities group; the Human Rights groups in CAP and CASS; and an emerging CASS-CAP memory studies network).

**Enhancing the Research Culture**

1) Placing people within a single school will not necessarily enhance teaching or research. Integration would have a better chance if RSHA funding were available to support an initial retreat where staff could begin to meet and share their research and teaching interests, projects and practices.

2) A primary challenge to sustaining an active research culture is achieving an effective balance between teaching and research. Given differences in teaching methods and practices, it is unlikely that a single workload model will work across the school; workload models will need to be developed within each constitutive unit, but with an eye to equity between staff and disciplines.

3) A merger may enhance the number of research grant applications, but both SCI and SLS have a high percentage of staff at level B who are heavily engaged in teaching. Many have young families. Most of the Level B staff do not qualify as ECR. Resources should be targeted in ways that address the needs of this group by positioning them for grant success. For instance, RSHA could enhance the research culture in a new school by using strategic funds to provide research/teaching support to research teams in key areas, with the aim of facilitating grant applications.

**Enhancing Postgraduate Experience**

The postgraduate experience could be significantly enhanced by the creation of a larger student cohort, with more shared opportunities. For instance, with sufficient staff resources and student numbers, HDR coursework could be developed specifically in the field of literary studies. Further consolidation of the cohort of students in languages and literary studies (including drama and film) could be achieved by merging HDR students in SCI and SLS with literary students from the Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Humanities group. Currently students in these groups have little interaction (for instance, in 2013 no students from SLS or IHuG are taking HUMN8104, Thesis Writing Workshop, offered through SCI, although students from the College of Law are enrolled). Integrating students from these three groups would reduce internal competition for HDR students, and students would be exposed to the range of academic staff who could serve on their panels. Integration would improve critical mass, and provide larger staff and student audiences for student presentations (for instance, during the TPR process). It would generate a critical mass, which would make viable initiatives such as reading and writing groups. For all of these reasons, SCI sees real possibilities for enhanced postgraduate education with the creation of a larger and more integrated graduate student cohort. We believe a full integration must draw together language, literature and film students from the constituent schools and programs within SCI, SLS, and IHuG.
Co-Location & Name

If a new school is created, the name will be an important means of providing visibility. English staff insist that the name rightly include ‘literatures’. Classics and Ancient History, as well as Linguistics and Languages also wish to be named, so there will clearly need to be wide consultation and compromise. At the very least, some visibility of SCI disciplines in the name will be essential. In light of problems with the nomenclature of the ‘School of Cultural Inquiry’, SCI would be wary of including ‘cultures’ in the name.

The visibility of Humanities and synergies between staff would be enhanced by co-locating a merged school, together with the HRC and the Digital Humanities Hub, in a single building. At present, however, this appears impossible due to language labs and Classics Museum being in separate buildings. Under the current conditions, staff in SCI prefer to stay in their current offices so that they can be housed near postgraduates, and so that Classics and Ancient History is not isolated from other areas of the school, or from the Museum, which staff use regularly as a teaching tool.

The RSHA proposal envisions moving Art History to the School of Art. Art History staff strongly prefer to remain with their SCI colleagues in a larger school of languages and literatures (see their individual submissions). SCI colleagues support this request, and see intellectual and pedagogic benefits from positioning Art History as a cognate discipline in a new school. Art History has links within SCI, especially with Film, which offers a course on Film and Visual Arts, and Art History students take courses in English, GSC and Classics. Art History PhD students make a valuable contribution to the PhD cohort in the school. Further links could be developed with colleagues in European languages.

HRC & Digital Humanities

Staff would welcome the HRC’s attachment as an independent centre to a new school of languages and literatures. Clearly, the research profiles of staff in the HRC, with considerable expertise in literature and humanities, would enhance collaborative research. Pathways have already been laid down, for instance, with Des Manderson’s Law and Humanities group, which involves staff from SCI, and with various projects involving Debjani Ganguly and SCI staff. Over the years, many staff in SCI, particularly in English, Gender and Film, have convened HRC conferences and participated in workshops and seminars.

Staff in SCI believe the HRC, working with the schools in RSHA, could play a vital role in re-visioning the Humanities at ANU, and in positioning ANU Humanities in a national context by developing strong ties with national institutions in Canberra. The main barriers to a fuller integration of the HRC in CASS stem from issues concerning governance (particularly the limited roles of the schools in HRC planning) and physical and structural proximity. SCI favours a widely publicised review of the HRC’s role within CASS as a means of providing a basis for structural change and for re-visioning the role of the HRC for the 21st century.

SCI would welcome the textual sections of Digital Humanities Hub in a new school of languages and literatures. SCI staff are interested in developing digital humanities approaches in their teaching. Clearly, given that two of the Digital Humanities staff have expertise in French and Australian literature, and that Katherine Bode will be joining English in 2016, there are strong pedagogical and intellectual reasons for integration. The expertise of the Digital Humanities staff
would greatly enhance teaching and research possibilities in a new school of languages and literatures.

Achieving Administrative Efficiency

HoS role

The RSHA restructure proposal anticipates efficiency savings through dis-establishing two HoS roles (SCI and IHuG). In the projected new School of Languages and Literatures there will be at least four separate disciplinary areas to oversee and integrate (Linguistics, Languages, Classics and English, as well as film minor and gender major.) SCI and SLS operate very differently in terms of teaching models and sessional teaching budgets. As HoS, I would recommend retaining two separate budgets and perhaps two HoS roles in the first year of the merger, so that issues can be worked out over the year to ensure a smooth transition.

Staff in SCI believe that a head and a deputy head should be drawn from each of the former schools, with each physical location (AD Hope and Baldessin) having present either a head or deputy head. SCI staff wish to be consulted in identifying a head and a deputy head for the new merged school.

Professional Staff

Currently, both SCI and SLS are operating with reduced administrative staff numbers, due to unanticipated resignations. Catalina Lopera (SSA for SCI) has drawn up a plan to work through the merging of admin staff in the two schools, regardless of whether there is a formal merger. Staff in the two schools are meeting weekly to map out the administrative tasks that need to be covered, and to plan for how best that can be facilitated. For instance, staff in SCI and SLS with responsibility for HDR are currently working together to see how HDR can be administered across the two schools.

Conclusion

A carefully managed merger of cognate disciplines presents opportunities for enhancing research and education, especially perhaps at postgraduate level. A merger is more likely to succeed if it has support of staff – eg, what constitutes a ‘cognate’ discipline must be agreed upon by the staff involved. It is unfortunate that this restructure proposal has been perceived, amongst students, as part of a raft of changes, including changes to tutorials and to the BA review. Students need to be reassured that the creation of a new school does not mean the loss of cherished Humanities disciplines and fields.

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