

July 19, 2021

To Whom it May Concern:

We write with respect with the School of Social Sciences Proposal for Change at the University of Western Australia. The International Society for Political Psychology (ISPP) is an international interdisciplinary scientific society that includes scholars and practitioners in political science, psychology, sociology, philosophy, development, international studies, and related disciplines. The European Association of Social Psychology (EASP) is an international scientific society of social psychologists whose research spans a variety of methods, epistemologies, and approaches, work that is both theoretical and applied. Hence, members of both our organizations appreciate the humanities and social sciences and how the work of those disciplines is critical to educating citizens of our world.

The most pressing problems our world faces today – such as climate disruption, over-consumption, poverty, migration, intolerance, and fragile governance -- are fundamentally problems of human social relationships. Most societies today contain within them traditional values and cultural meaning systems along with more modern conceptions of justice and standards set by global communication. Similarly, societies have a variety of types of economies, several distinctive groups, and people with different histories. Against such diversity within and between societies do individuals, institutions, governments, and social groups strive to deliver or obtain a set of universal desires: a home, community and family, meaningful work, stability, and freedom. Our era has made being satisfied in all these ways both more easy to imagine and more complex to organize. We cannot hope to equip people to address such needs without them being well-educated concerning how cultures and societies work. We are therefore strongly opposed to diminishing the anthropology and sociology faculty in the Proposal. These disciplines are particularly essential for students in an increasingly globalizing world, and no less so for future engineers and doctors and attorneys than for future artists and farmers and politicians. We do not see how an organization could call itself a University without majors in both disciplines.

We find other aspects of the Proposal equally problematic. The rebuttal calls into question most of the numerical data garnered in support of the Proposal, where units (e.g., of student/faculty ratios) are incomparable, and causes (e.g., of unemployment rates) are misattributed. These are not practices of someone well-trained in social sciences. In addition, the proposal to convert research-active faculty to teaching-only faculty not only mis-serves faculty members, but students and Australia. University students are educated in the classroom, laboratory, and field, but also in conversations they can have, especially in small classes and in outside meetings, with faculty members about the current problems that concern students and the research problems faculty members are defining. Universities are not factories that teach people to follow given recipes. They are experiential schools for learning what approaches can be taken, how to define a problem, how to imagine something new, how to evaluate it, and communicating with a variety of audiences. Students learn these things first hand by interacting with faculty over their research or creative work. It is terribly inefficient to employ experts at such things but ask them not to use substantial aspects of their expertise. It is a terrible injustice to students to presume that they should be taught at a university level by people who are not engaged in the front-line work of their fields.

A total reorganization of a School is not something to be done in two-weeks time, especially when it does not build organically on most of the resources in the School itself. The remedy that was proposed for people losing their jobs to hire experts in one area into a different area seems markedly inefficient. In addition, we would remind you that if faculty positions at the school become insecure and unstable, it will make it increasingly difficult for you to attract high-caliber scholars in the future to serve on the faculty. Instead of this Proposal, we urge you to listen to what the faculty members of the School have to offer and to their own wisdom. This, after all, is their area of expertise and the university they create with their work.

In short, eliminating regular faculty positions, sociology and anthropology, and converting regular faculty positions to teaching-emphasis positions would undermine the standing of the University of Western Australia and diminish the education it provides. We urge you to retain the faculty you have and to use their expertise, wisdom, and insights to determine the School's next steps.

Sincerely,

Kai Jonas, Ph.D., President of EASP on behalf of EASP

Tereza Capelos, Ph.D., President of ISPP, on behalf of ISPP