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June 6, 2024

**THERESA MALDONADO, VICE PRESIDENT  
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION**

**Re: Five-Year Review of the UC Humanities Research Institute**

Dear Vice President Maldonado:

At its May 22, 2024 meeting, the Academic Council approved the attached five-year review of the UC Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) Multicampus Research Unit (MRU). Following procedures outlined in the Compendium, the review was performed by a joint Senate review committee, led by the University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP), with input from the University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB) and the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA). We request that you forward the report to the UCHRI director.

The joint committee’s report praises UCHRI as a model for leveraging the collective strength of the UC system and acknowledges its accomplishments over the past five years despite challenges such as leadership changes and COVID-19. The report identifies both strengths and weaknesses in UCHRI’s multicampus operations, future goals, budget, administration, and governance. A key concern is the decline in regranting proposals, highlighting the need for additional funding. Recommendations include enhancing leadership stability, transparency, diversity efforts, and communication of funding criteria. The review committee endorses UCHRI’s continuation for another five years, with securing Mellon Foundation funding and appointing a permanent leader as top priorities.

The Academic Council appreciates the significant time and effort the review committee spent in preparing this report. In particular, I want to recognize the contributions of UCORP Vice Chair Susanne Nicholas, who led the review.

Thank you for the opportunity to opine. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

James Steintrager, Chair  
Academic Council

Cc: Academic Council  
UCORP  
Senate Division Executive Directors  
Senate Executive Director Lin



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH POLICY (UCORP)  
Cynthia Schumann, Chair  
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May 14, 2024

JAMES STEINTRAGER  
CHAIR, ACADEMIC COUNCIL

**RE: Five-Year MRU Review of the UC Humanities Research Institute**

Dear Jim,

On behalf of the MRU review committee, I am submitting to the Academic Council the five-year review report of the UC Humanities Research Institute. UCHRI was reviewed as specified by the Compendium, with UCORP as the lead committee and participation by liaisons from UCPB and CCGA. The five-year review is meant to assess the unit's activities with regard to its stated purpose, present functioning, funding record, future plans, and continuing development to meet the needs in the field.

UCORP would like to thank Kathleen Erwin and Anna Ward from the Research Grants Program Office for their support leading up to and during the reviews.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Schumann  
Chair, University Committee on Research Policy

## UC Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) Five-Year Review

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Conducted on behalf of the Academic Senate by the University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP), with input from the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and University Committee on Planning and Budget

April 30, 2024

### **OVERALL IMPRESSION**

UC Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) was established in 1987 to serve research faculty and graduate students in the humanities, humanistic social sciences, and arts. The institute collaborates with campus humanities centers through the UC Humanities Network consortium to work with faculty and graduate students. With research funding from foundations and UC's Multicampus Research Programs and Initiatives (MRPI) competition, UCHRI serves the UC community by providing support for collaborative and interdisciplinary research, providing grants to facilitate exploratory and impactful multicampus research projects, fostering new research directions in the humanities, highlighting innovative intercampus collaborations, supporting mentoring programs, refugee scholarships, prison education, critical AI, climate communications and global connections, and conducting surveys/studies on undergraduate education and career paths for graduate students. During the reporting period, UCHRI underwent significant changes, including the disruptive impact of COVID-19 on collaborative research and a leadership transition. The accomplishments over the past five years have been important and substantial, especially given the major changes in leadership structure and the challenges incurred by COVID-19. Initiatives such as the Foundry, Stories from the Field, and the UC Underrepresented Scholars Fellowship Program raise the profile of UC Humanities. In general, the content and approach of UCHRI are commendable and represent a model for how an MRU can leverage the collective strength of our multi-campus university system. The challenges and concerns include diminishing regrating proposals from 284 (2018-2019) to 58 (2022-2023). In essence, UCHRI's ability to secure funding to match the grant from the Mellon Foundation is key to its future.

### **MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS**

#### **Strengths**

- UCHRI's report "*Stories from the Field, Humanists@Work*," which examines the economic outcomes and career trajectories of humanities PhDs, offers insights that are extremely valuable at this time for reimagining graduate education at UC.
- UCHRI has been responsive in addressing previous review suggestions to support underrepresented scholars.
- UCHRI continues to disseminate scholarship and engage in innovative projects ranging from climate communications to critical AI theory.
- The Critical Refugee Studies program is both timely and impactful and the Asia Theories Network expanded the reach of UCHRI to the global scale.
- UCHRI continues to show strong community engagement.
- UCHRI received \$750,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2018 to improve undergraduate liberal arts education.
- Multiple grants and fellowships across campuses that include collaborative proposals among faculty at different campuses.

- Started a *UC-funded climate action project* in 2023 in collaboration with STEM and social science faculty.
- UCHRI is well positioned to receive additional support through private foundations.

### **Weaknesses**

- Declining participation and declining funds. Also, the UCHRI continues to operate with a 2:1 ratio of overhead to subawards, which may be fine when funding levels are high, but may not be ideal when funding is scarce.
- Substantial drop-off in applications for funding and in total funding distributed through grants program over the past 5 years, with funding in 2022-2023 particularly low.
- Operations led by an interim director for an extended period of time.
- Metrics of success for diverse programs should be established upfront and evaluated afterwards to assess their impact.
- In the wake of the ASE/GSE strike at the end of 2022, it seems UCHRI might have a role to play in rethinking of the future of graduate student education in the humanities. This was not mentioned in the report as a future activity or area of interest and may be a missed opportunity.

## ***MULTI-CAMPUS OPERATIONS***

### **Strengths**

- The MRU appears to be very active across all UC campuses, both through their grants program as well as direct engagement through the UC Humanities Network and Consortium.
- Multicampus engagement is emphasized in their competitive programs.
- The restructuring of the governance structure seems well thought out and likely to promote greater engagement with faculty across all ten UC campuses.

### **Weaknesses**

- UCHRI is not universally known among humanities scholars at UC. There is still more to be done to make UCHRI part of the fabric of humanities research and education at each of the ten UC campuses.

## ***FUTURE GOALS***

### **Strengths**

- Forward looking programming and support of innovative research across campuses, e.g. on critical AI and environmental humanities.
- Supporting underrepresented scholars and faculty diversity at UC, and seeding new areas of inquiry, e.g., via the Foundry.
- The existing programs are vital and meaningful, and UCHRI has a strong record of creating new programs and even fields that last. It continues to contribute both to the UC's system's mission and to the state of California.
- UCHRI has an innovative vision with plans to address California regional issues.
- Mellon Foundation is outstanding. The goal of meeting Mellon Foundation's \$20M match is a highlighted priority.

## **Weaknesses**

- Uncertainty in funding and leadership, particularly recruitment of a permanent director, have limited the time horizon for planning for the future.
- There could be more discussion of how existing staff and resources can be deployed in new ways to attract donors or other funds.
- Given UCHRI's dual reporting relationships to UCOP and UCI, providing insights into its financial sustainability and plans for resource utilization, especially in the context of hosting and operating the MRU, would add value.

## ***BUDGET***

### **Strengths**

- Creative solution to meeting the Mellon Foundation's matching grant seems promising. The future of the MRU depends on the outcome of this crucial funding.
- UCHRI is working proactively to manage staff and administrative costs in the face of declining revenues.
- Responding strategically to declining funding levels, such as renting out apartments it no longer uses for long-term visitors to UCI faculty and carrying forward what seems like a healthy amount of funding each year to provide a safety net.
- UCHRI's regranting program has been consistently successful, distributing significant amounts of MRPI funds to numerous projects. The program's ability to fund a diverse range of projects demonstrates its impact and reach.
- Positive balance was carried forward for each year.
- Distribution of resources across campuses is rather exceptional, based on summary numbers, and appears to have been consistent over time.
- Association with STEM scholars for grant writing (e.g., Climate project) is a good idea. Support of this type of collaboration could enhance extramural funding successes.

### **Weaknesses**

- With only a third or less of the budget going to grant funding, a better explanation of the rationale for fund allocation would be helpful.
- Some reviewers were skeptical that the Underrepresented Scholars Fellowship Program represents a good use of resources (pairing mentor-mentees rather than giving that money directly to the mentee to develop a stronger tenure portfolio).
- Metrics to evaluate impact/success of funded programs are needed.

## ***ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE***

### **Strengths**

- A new governance structure comprising the President's Advisory Committee for Research in the Humanities as a steering committee, a Board of Advisors (replacing the Board of Governors), and a Grants Review Committee looks promising. The new governance structure will help to incorporate more leaders and representation from each campus.

- Following the step down of David Theo Goldberg on June 22, 2021, Julia Lupton began as Interim Director (through June 30, 2025). The Interim Director is energetic and highly effective.
- Administrative costs / staff salaries have been dramatically reduced over the past two years.

### **Weaknesses**

- Long-term planning has been hampered by temporary leadership and funding uncertainty.
- Unclear whether there a term limit for Board of Advisor members.

### ***CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS***

UCHRI occupies a unique place in the UC system and plays a vital role in supporting and connecting faculty and students in the humanities across all ten UC campuses, and in linking UC researchers and creators to the communities around them.

In securing substantial funding from foundations, UCHRI supports humanities research and represents a model for how an MRU can leverage the combined strength of our multi-campus university system. This support will enable innovative and exploratory research, strengthening UC's contributions to humanities scholarship. UCHRI's engagement in faculty development and dissemination of research findings further enhances its impact. The MRU's projects are responsive to the needs of Californians, both in the academy and outside of it, and while one may question the effectiveness of individual efforts, the portfolio of projects supported is world class. UCHRI appears to be fulfilling its mission effectively and is making concerted efforts to increase its visibility. Recommendations include enhancing stability during leadership transitions, improving transparency in reporting, sustaining commitment to diversity, collecting and disseminating data on diversity and inclusion in applications and funded awards, establishing and effectively communicating funding criteria for individual funding opportunity upfront, surveying faculty across campuses to identify actionable items to address concerns with relevant progress reports, including both the Interim Director and stable members in future grant applications and conducting a comprehensive impactful assessment. UCHRI's continued existence as an MRU is very well justified. The loss of this MRU would be a significant blow to both the scholarly community and to the public, with junior humanities scholars being most impacted.

In short, continuation of UCHRI for another five years is warranted given its significant contributions that would be challenging to replicate without its existence. Once the Mellon Foundation funding is secured, identifying a permanent leader should be a top priority.