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Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts Research: A framework for identifying impact and indicators

Project Update: May 2014



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Background

The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences is leading a major initiative to develop a framework for assessing and measuring the impact of research in the humanities, social sciences and arts. This project does not aim to measure impact, but to describe approaches and indicators that others can draw from in designing studies to measure and compare the impact of research both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This note describes progress to date, the approach envisioned for the framework, and key dates moving forward.

Introduction

Measuring the impact of *any* research is very difficult. But research in the arts, humanities and social sciences is recognized as being particularly complicated to measure, as accessible measures commonly used in scientific and technical disciplines such as citations, patents and licensing revenues are less relevant or even misleading.

Individual projects in the arts, humanities and social sciences may be able to document metrics such as tax dollars saved, lives improved, or policies changed (although in the arts and humanities in particular relevant impact metrics are sometimes difficult to find even at the project level). The real challenge lies in *comparing* impact across different research, whether that comparison is at the level of the country, institution, department or individual. This challenge is well-recognized in large scale assessments of research. For example, in Canada, the Council of Canadian Academies Report on the State of S&T in Canada¹ recognized the limitations of existing metrics and challenged the community: *“The Panel hopes that the report will spur further discussion in the humanities, arts, and social sciences on how these fields should be assessed on a macro scale, and how the data required for such assessments could be collected.”*

Although there are many arguments to support the view that there should not even be attempts to compare the impact of research – that all research is important and cannot be compared, and that we cannot easily predict the time from research to impact – the reality is that impact measurement *will* continue, particularly in an increasingly resource-constrained but data-rich world². Major policy or

¹ <http://www.scienceadvice.ca/en/assessments/completed/science-tech.aspx>http://www.scienceadvice.ca/uploads/eng/assessments%20and%20publications%20and%20news%20releases/sandt_ii/stateofst2012_fullreporten.pdf

² E.g., <http://heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/FINAL%20Teaching%20Loads%20and%20Research%20Outputs%20ENG.pdf>

funding decisions frequently use the results of these analyses, regardless of the robustness or validity of the data. Ideally the research community themselves should be at the forefront of determining how impact in their fields can and should be measured and assessed, and offering guidance on how to avoid mistaken applications of these measures. The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, representing 85,000 scholars, is well-placed to take a leadership role in these discussions in Canada.

This discussion is international; projects in the U.S.³, U.K.^{4,5,6}, the European Union⁷, Australia⁸ and around the world⁹ are grappling with understanding and measuring impact. These international projects can provide valuable examples of interesting practices on which to build a framework relevant to Canada. However, the Canadian situation is unique due to the combination of factors such as our bilingual research enterprise, the role of the provinces in higher education, and our geographic size and location. The Federation, a bilingual national organization with both scholarly associations and academic institutions in its membership and close links to stakeholders such as funding agencies, is a natural choice to lead discussions. The international interest in this topic also means that the Federation's work will have value and reach well beyond Canada.

Often impact in the HSS is demonstrated in the form of case studies¹⁰, which are extremely valuable and can be compelling. Case studies demonstrate not only the impact of individual projects being described but also by extension the potential of all HSS research to have impact, and are undoubtedly an important way of assessing and communicating impact. However, case studies are not dealt with in this study, which aims to propose a series of indicators with the potential to measure and *compare* at levels beyond an individual research project or cluster of research projects.

Outputs of this project

- **A widely disseminated report** that outlines a high-level approach to measuring the impact of research in humanities, social sciences and arts. This report is not intended to be an academic assessment of the theory of impact measurement, but a plain-language practical document which makes use of advances in the field to propose impact measures and methods of assessment of HSS research in Canada. The intent is that organizations involved in assessing and measuring the impact of HSS research will be able to draw from these indicators to inform their methodology and/or to document where there are critical shortcomings in the available methodologies.

³ http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/fdp/PGA_057189

⁴ <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/about-the-project/>

⁵ E.g., <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/414173.article>

⁶ <http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/graduateimpact>

⁷ <http://www.heranet.info/heravalue/index>

⁸ <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2519.html>

⁹ E.g., http://www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB578.html

¹⁰ E.g., http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Taking%20Stock_tcm8-4545.pdf



- **Ongoing discussion** on if, why, and how the impact of humanities, social sciences and arts can be measured.

Desired outcomes of this project

- A stronger agreement on how impact should be measured in the arts, humanities and social sciences.
- More robust approaches to measures and discussions of impact in the arts, social sciences and humanities at disciplinary, institutional, national and international levels.
- The Federation will serve its members and other stakeholders by leading the discussion on measuring impact, and in so doing take a more pro-active role at a time when the social sciences, arts and humanities have often been put on the defensive.

Progress to date

The Federation is looking forward to engaging the HSS community in this discussion of impact measurement and is currently preparing a draft report for consultation and input. At the heart of the framework being developed is the recognition that HSS research has impact in a variety of different ways. The framework will outline different broad categories of impact, and some of the ways in which they can be measured and assessed. It is not intended that every impact study would use all indicators, or that all categories of impact would be measured. Rather, the framework could act as a starting point for discussion on the types of impact that are relevant to be measured or assessed and what indicators could be used, taking into account factors such as time, cost and relevance.

Currently, it is anticipated that the draft report will describe different and non-hierarchical categories of impact – such as “HSS research has impacts on the economy”, and then detail different types of indicators providing, where appropriate, links to studies that have used these indicators. **The aim is to release this draft report in Fall 2014, for wide consultation online and in-person. A final report will then be produced in 2015.** Importantly, the intent is that this document will remain “living” even after the final version so as to adjust to the ever-expanding impact of humanities, social science and arts research. In addition, technological advances will undoubtedly provide opportunities to add new indicators in the future, and advancements in knowledge may lead to revisions in indicators and their interpretation currently in widespread usage.

Below is a graphical summary of the overall approach currently being considered, which will likely form the basis of the draft report. We have developed the following architecture, and are identifying indicators to populate this structure. Both the categories and the types of indicators are currently under development and advice will be sought on these during the consultation phase.

DRAFT FRAMEWORK

HSS research has impacts on

SCHOLARSHIP

that can be measured using indicators such as:

- Bibliometric indicators
- Downloads from Open Access repositories
- Citations in grant applications
- Acknowledgements
- Prizes and awards
- Post-publication peer-review (book reviews, dedicated symposia)
- Juried exhibitions and performances

HSS research has impacts on

CAPACITY

through teaching and mentoring

that can be measured using indicators such as:

- Career data for graduates
- Number and quality of experiential learning/ research opportunities for students
- Surveys of students
- Honours and awards
- Employer surveys

HSS research has impacts on the

ECONOMY

that can be measured using indicators such as:

- Advisory roles and board memberships of researchers
- Revenue opportunities and cost savings in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors resulting from research applied in practice
- Income derived from patents, patent licensing, copyright and trademarks
- Consulting contracts

HSS research has impacts on

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

that can be measured using indicators such as:

- Number and quality of partnerships between researchers and community groups
- Requests for consultancy/ advice from community groups
- Media coverage of research (newspapers/ tv/ online)
- Attendance at public events
- Research-related social media
- Public use of research-based web resources on social issues

HSS research has impacts on

PRACTICE AND POLICY

that can be measured using indicators such as:

- Invitations to participate as an expert witness, an advisor, on an expert panel or committee
- Citations in government documents
- Consulting for governments or think-tanks
- Commissioned reports
- Suit submissions



Key Dates

Congress 2014 – Brock University www.congress2014.ca

Discussion of project approach and objectives and progress to date
Tuesday 27 May, 10:30am-12 noon

Fall 2014

Draft report is released for consultation
Date to be announced

Spring 2015

Final report released
Date to be announced

The **Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences** works to promote the value of research and learning in the humanities and social sciences. Its membership comprises over 80 scholarly associations, 79 post-secondary institutions and six affiliate organizations, representing 85,000 researchers, educators and students across Canada.

In advancing equity, diversity, knowledge, excellence and innovation, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences contributes tangibly to a free and democratic society.

The Federation:

- Organizes Canada's largest annual gathering of academic researchers, the **Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences**
- Brings leading scholars to Parliament Hill to discuss public policy and public relevance in our **Big Thinking** lecture series
- Supports the publication and sharing of new ideas through our **Awards to Scholarly Publications Program**

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