

## Review of Wyoming Institute for Humanities Research

Fall, 2024

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### Summary

The review committee assessed if WIHR is serving the campus needs broadly in supporting humanities research, promoting humanities scholarship in advancing the frontiers in humanities, and addressing some of the grand challenges in humanities by bringing together faculty with diverse expertise. Its key specific recommendations include:

- Revise the governance structure
  - An external advisory committee will help the institute in formulating programs and processes using a national context.
  - An Internal steering committee should function as a steering committee.
  - Internal governance committee composed of VPRED and relevant Deans.
- Clarify the role of the Director
  - The director should be a facilitator and coordinator of the Institute's activities. They should not be the sole "deliverer" of its programs.
  - The director should have term limits of no longer than 5 years.
  - The director should be a leader for humanities on campus, especially when humanities matters rise above individual humanities departments and individuals, or need input or leadership from outside established administrative hierarchies. Their leadership should complement the other humanities leaders and administrators on campus.
  - The director reports to the VP for Research and Economic Development but interacts with the Dean of Arts and Sciences and key figures in A&S and elsewhere.
- Broaden programming to serve humanities faculty across campus
  - The current Humanities Research Program that offers faculty fellowships should continue, perhaps in a revised form.
  - The Institute should serve as a central locus for humanities activities and humanities faculty on campus, offering several ways to interact with it—providing for different needs of humanities faculty across campus.
  - New programming that fosters connections among individuals working in the humanities across campus, across disciplines and across ranks.
- Foster areas of excellence in humanities research to reflect Wyoming's relevance and support its faculty's development of national and global involvement and reputation.

## Report

The Wyoming Institute of Humanities Research (WIHR) is a university-level research institute at the University of Wyoming and reports to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development (<https://www.uwyo.edu/humanities/>). In fall 2024, WIHR underwent a five-year review of its performance. A committee of experts in humanities research reviewed the WIHR self-study and attended the committee meeting on November 18-19 to review WIHR. The committee input led to this report which includes recommendations on how to improve WIHR's performance as well as its management structure, financial sustainability, and leadership.

### Review Committee

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**Paul Flesher**

Director, American Heritage Center  
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### Review Process

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The committee examined WIHR and its programs based on the following resources:

- A self-study report prepared by the institute
- copies of materials from the last review (if appropriate),
- information gained through interactions with center personnel, relevant faculty and administrators during the institute review conducted at the University of Wyoming
- Presentation(s) by the institute during the in-person meeting
- copies of strategic plans and goal-setting documents and
- additional information as requested by the committee (e.g. budget, CV of the director, etc.).

Within the broad charge of recommending WIHR improvements, the committee considered some specific questions:

- Based on the data / information provided in the self-study report or gathered by the external review team, what are the institute's overall strengths?
- Does the institute serve all faculty on campus? Does it foster the leading-edge topics in humanities? Does it promote research at the interface between humanities and other disciplines?

- How well do the institute's strategic goals align with those of UW?
- How would this institute compare with its peers?
- With only current resources or a modest infusion of new ones, what specific recommendations could improve the institute's performance, marginally or significantly?
- What is the assessment of the institute's director's performance in providing vision, ensuring a broad outreach to campus, and making the institute financially stable and less dependent on the core funding?

### **Strengths of WIHR**

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- The committee recognized that the Humanities Research Group program has the strongest impact among all activities conducted by WIHR. Fellows work together in weekly meetings working towards tangible outcomes. The fellows are excited about the program and appreciate how it helps them establish their careers through interdisciplinary interactions developed during the program. This program should continue.
- The committee was impressed by the quality and energy of the humanities faculty they met during various meetings. Faculty engaged with WIHR bring significant amounts of energy, time, and effort to the Institute.
- The WIHR Director has made a significant commitment to WIHR programs and is dedicated to its function. The committee noted that the director clearly enjoys working with faculty and providing feedback on their projects.

### **Areas for Improvement in Governance**

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#### **Director:**

- The director should be selected through a competitive process and hired with a term limit of 3-5 years. If desirable, the position could be renewable for up to 3 more years, perhaps on a year-by-year basis.
- UW should define the role of the Director as a Servant Leader. The director position should be defined as a facilitator and a steward. The director provides a platform for research and innovation in humanities and interdisciplinary research.
- The Director should have an inward-facing role, i.e. towards all humanities faculty. They should facilitate the connections among all humanities faculty, junior and senior, enabling connections and creating synergy among them. Under their leadership, the Institute should facilitate the development of disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research explorations and projects—helping to develop nascent ideas into projects ready for major grant funding. The Institute should support faculty, especially junior faculty, as they develop the full range of skills and talents needed to be a mature, successful researcher.
- The Director should have an outward facing role, leading and representing the humanities to the campus and its administration; to the state with its community, business, non-profit and political constituencies; and to the nation—especially through national humanities organizations. The director should help the Institute and humanities faculty connect with relevant humanities, arts and social science-oriented stakeholders, both on campus (e.g., the Art Museum, the American Heritage Center) and in the state (e.g., the Wyoming Historical Society, museums, archives and libraries).
- The Director should be preferably at full Professor level with an active research program. The programming by WIHR should be separated from the research agenda of the Director in their faculty role.

- WIHR should have an Associate Director from a different discipline to function as a thought partner and reduce the workload on the Director. Ideally the Associate Director is an associate or full professor from a unit different from the Director's unit.

### **Steering/Advisory Committees**

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- The steering committee should expand to include other key stakeholder groups.
- Potentially, WIHR should develop an external advisory board to bring in outside views and help in fund raising. The board could advise on major decisions (major speakers and programming, generally how funds should be used but not micro-managing funds, innovative thinking, connecting to broader communities at UW, the state, and beyond) and for cheerleading.

### **Accountability Structure**

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- WIHR should be required to submit annual reports to the VP Research and Economic Development, including a public facing version that can be posted online and used for communicating WIHR outcomes.
- The VP of Research and Economic Development should have significant role in the annual review, since the Director job is over 50% of the person's workload. This should be done in cooperation with the Director's home department.
- The review should be part of a reporting structure with a "dotted line" to the Dean of Arts and Sciences.

### **Processes and Policies**

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- WIHR should have clearly documented processes and policies in place. These include governance documents specifying roles and responsibilities, budget allocation process, review and selection process for the fellows, seed grants and other opportunities offered by WIHR in the future.
- UW's internal grant submission portal (InfoReady Review) should be used for seed grants and fellows.

### **Opportunities for the Institute in Programming**

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The committee made suggestions for changes that will broaden service to the campus and state, enhance WIHR's national stature and competitiveness, and increase its financial sustainability. It needs to do this by creating a variety of programs for humanities faculty across campus according to their differing needs, connecting humanities faculty of differing experience and disciplines to model success and developing connections and synergies. It should be a vehicle for supporting and showcasing humanities projects, research and achievements to the campus's humanities faculty and indeed to all of campus.

These changes in programming and functions of WIHR include:

- WIHR must have a broad vision that highlights strategies, programs, and Wyoming-relevant areas of excellence in humanities.
- Strategic planning process, identifying and bringing in new areas to the forefront. Not just aspirational, but practical and specific implementation framework should be included along with assessment and success metrics. Work with the College of A&S to develop a strategic plan.
- The strategic planning process should be informed by the original founding documents (from 2013). These were based on a year-long assessment of humanities research needs on campus involving a spectrum of humanities scholars from across campus.

- WIHR should play well with others; it should be a connector and a leader within the university—working with other units on campus.
- WIHR should work with organizations across the state to enable projects and research for targeted audiences. These could range from selected topics relevant to humanities organizations around the state to promoting research or research results that could positively impact aspects of Wyoming communities and business.
- WIHR should produce purposeful programming. Some possible areas include public humanities, professionalization, and leading areas of humanities inquiry.
- WIHR should focus on humanities support and scaffolding of areas that are too large for individual departments to achieve, and which could benefit faculty in many departments. A digital humanities laboratory that supports a program exploring digital humanities research is a good example of this and was part of the original strategic plan for WIHR.
- WIHR should increase its portfolio of activities and curtail or eliminate the Democracy Laboratory. It was not clear to the committee how Democracy Lab leads to peer-reviewed, nationally recognized research.
- The events organized by WIHR should be purposeful, intentional, strategic and distributed throughout the year. Current emphasis on providing sponsorship of humanities events organized by others should be reduced or eliminated. Some WIHR humanities events should feature UW faculty who are accomplishing successful research; these can serve as a model for other campus humanities scholars.
- WIHR must seed, nurture and grow areas of excellence in humanities research across the campus. It is important that these areas are relevant to Wyoming and to helping UW, its faculty and its students, take a role in matters of national and international concern. It should work to help UW humanities faculty be nationally and/or internationally competitive for obtaining funding and recognition.
- The financial organization of WIHR should be restructured. WIHR's current financial structure prioritizes grant-giving but relies almost solely on its annual budget provided by the university. This is not a viable model for success.
- WIHR should change its priorities of how it spends its financial resources. More funds should be directed to campus-wide programming and programs to benefit a broader range of faculty.
- Financial restructuring should be based on the new strategic plan mentioned above.
- With the help of the Research Development Office, WIHR should facilitate grant activities in humanities directed at obtaining funding from non-profit as well as government sources. It should seek to expand its grant-giving activities with external funding. It should also work with the UW Foundation to explore other sources of monetary support.
- WIHR should participate more actively in national humanities leadership networks, such as CHCI, to prompt programming innovation and integrate UW into possible funding networks.
- There is a need for a humanities, social science, and arts research advancement specialist who would be part of the VP of Research and Economic Development team (not housed at WIHR).
- WIHR should consider a part-time hire for documenting events (film and photography) and communicating these events (newsletter, YouTube, social media, press releases, etc.). To create a full-time position, this could be a joint position with another entity on campus, such as the American Heritage Center. The current project coordinator could serve as an event coordinator.

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