

# New SSHRC president's first priority is to demonstrate value of existing investment

The new president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) says his first priority is to demonstrate that the funding his agency currently receives is money well spent before approaching government for additional resources. Dr Chad Gaffield took up the reins of SSHRC last month, filling a void left by Dr Marc Renaud, who ended a volatile eight-year term when he departed last August ([R\\$, May 18/05](#)). Gaffield's arrival ends a lengthy period of suspended animation at SSHRC, after it articulated its intention to transform itself into a knowledge council with international reach ([R\\$, September 3/04](#)).

Gaffield was selected to replace Renaud before the summer but had to wait until the Harper government was ready to make the announcement.

The impact of Renaud's resignation was compounded by the change in government, interrupting SSHRC's advocacy for change and additional funding while day-to-day operations were handled by Dr Stan Shapson (VP research and international relations at York Univ) and Dr Janet Halliwell (SSHRC's executive VP). Prior to his departure, Renaud made an unsuccessful push for a doubling of SSHRC's budget from \$237 million (excluding flow-through funding) to more than \$500 million ([R\\$, March 9/05](#)). The inaugural Harper Budget provided an additional \$6 million ([R\\$, May 16/06](#)).

Rather than focus on the need for more funding, Gaffield is taking a different approach, consistent with the increased emphasis on accountability and value-for-money. (The granting agencies were the subjects of an accountability and value-for-money audit over the summer).

## **DEMONSTRATE VALUE**

The new tact is arguably also an implicit recognition that the Harper government - particularly its Reform Party wing - is suspicious of much of the research funded by SSHRC.

"My most important job is to make crystal clear the ways in which SSHRC advances knowledge and invests in human capital. We need to connect the dots to show the benefits of the money being spent," he says. "I'm going to advocate the exact amount (of funding) we need after we assess the value of investments thus far. We need to make the case and the amount must be the result of our ability to show why this is a good investment."

To get to that point, Gaffield says SSHRC must work to gather additional information, including the career trajectories of people who have received SSHRC support in the past.

"We have not yet put the compelling evidence together that exists. In some cases we have not collected it," says Gaffield. "We have to make clear that the money we get now is contributing significantly. If we make the argument effectively, we will get support from Canadian taxpayers."

Once SSHRC gets a more accurate handle on the impact of federal investment and develops an action plan for its new strategy, the agency will be in a far better position to determine what's required to implement its transformation into a knowledge council. That includes a concerted

effort to move Canadian social sciences and humanities research onto the world stage.

Gaffield also plans to expand the representation of SSHRC's governing council and address his status as both council chair and SSHRC president.

"This is not a situation I'm familiar with. It should not be the same person and needs to be changed," he says. "It will take us a while to get there. It requires a change to the act governing SSHRC."

Gaffield comes to SSHRC from the Univ of Ottawa on a five-year leave of absence. A noted historian, he will take leave from his leadership position with the Canadian Century Research Infrastructure (CCRI) project. The CCRI is a major project that is cross-indexing the databases of a century's worth of national census information.

"The key thing I bring to SSHRC is a strong sense that we do control our own destiny. This comes from my historical studies and work with learned societies," he says. "We are not victims and we can get where we want to go. Do do that, we must meet Canadian society's needs and contribute to world understanding."

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