Alternative Fifth Year Review of Canada Research Chairs Program
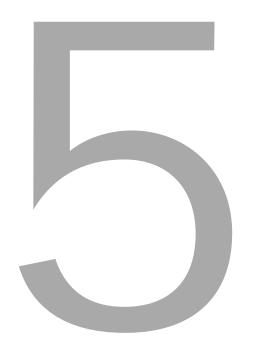
5

Canadian Association
of University Teachers

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

When the Canada Research Chairs Program was introduced in 2000, a variety of questions about the design and impact of the program were asked. Critics were assured that the CRC program would undergo thorough reviews in the third and fifth years. The CRC Steering Committee has carried out these reviews, contracting the work out to independent evaluators following guidelines established by the Steering Committee. The reviews consisted of a combination of analysis and focussed surveys of program participants, including chair-holders and host institutions. The most recent has been the fifth year evaluation. Prior to this, there was a gender-based analysis of the program (2002) and a third-year review (2002).[1] In the view of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the three "official" CRC studies [the gender-based analysis, the third year review, and the fifth year review] failed to address key concerns adequately.

Because of the substantial amount of federal money spent on the CRC program and its impact on Canada's university system, CAUT felt there was a need for a review that looked more carefully at critical aspects of the first five years of the program. CAUT undertook an alternative Fifth Year Review – seeking information from each academic staff association about the program at its institution and from each Canada Research Chair through a mailed questionnaire. This is a report of the findings.

II. The CRC Program: Background

The Canada Research Chairs Program was announced in the 2000 federal budget. It was described as the latest component of a strategy to enhance federal support for university research, joining the Canada Foundation for Innovation (1997) and the Canadian Opportunities Strategy (1998), in which the government announced its commitment to expanding "access to knowledge and skills." These programs, in turn, formed the basis of the federal government's greater emphasis on funding for post-secondary education through direct research and infrastructure support.

The Federal Government's Canada Research Chairs Program consisted of an allocation of $900 million to create 2,000 new university research chairs – divided into three disciplinary groups – natural sciences and engineering; health sciences; and social sciences and humanities (45%, 20% and 35%, respectively). The chairs are assigned to institutions in proportion to the amount of research grant funding each has received from the three federal funding agencies: NSERC, CIHR, and SSHRC in the three years prior to the year of the allocation. Out of the 2,000 chairs, the CRC program set aside a special allocation of 120 chairs for universities that have received one per cent or less of the total funding paid out by the three federal granting agencies over the past three years. This is to offset some of the disadvantage faced by small universities. Unlike regularly-allocated chairs, these chairs are not allocated by

granting agency (i.e., by area of research); universities can choose the areas in which they would like to use the chair.

Each eligible degree-granting institution receives an allocation of chairs and, for each, it nominates a researcher. That nomination is evaluated in relation to each institution's strategic research plan submitted at the outset of the program. The evaluation is undertaken by three members of a college of reviewers who assess each nomination and recommend whether to fund the position.

There are two types of CRC appointments, each with a distinct scholarly profile. Tier 1 Chairs bring their host university $200,000 a year for seven years, and are described as renewable. They are reserved for "world leaders" in their fields. Tier II Chairs bring the institution $100,000 a year for five years, and are renewable once. These are said to be reserved for "emerging" researchers, junior scholars "who have the potential to lead in their field." The emphasis on junior scholars is reinforced procedurally: if an institution nominates someone more than ten years from his or her "highest degree" the application must be accompanied by a "justification", and go before the Interdisciplinary Adjudication Committee.

Restrictions on the use of the money are comparable to those imposed by the three granting agencies, with the exception that the chairholder's salary is eligible to be paid . The university retains the authority to claim, as "eligible expenses": "administrative costs related to the Chair (for proposal writing, technology transfer, libraries, research

services, financial management, human resources)" and other costs not explicit in the program guidelines. There are also several avenues open to universities to gain access to dedicated infrastructure funding: the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Indirect Costs Program provide sizeable research support grants (typically supporting research technology) in conjunction with the research chairs.

The CRC Program is managed by a Steering Committee, made up of the presidents of the three federal research funding agencies, who take turns chairing, and the president of CFI and the Deputy Minister of Industry Canada (or designate).

III. Alternative Fifth Year Surveys

CAUT surveyed academic staff associations at Canadian universities and individual chairholders about their experience with the program. Surveys were conducted by mail. Academic staff associations were asked about the development of their institution's strategic plan, the process used for hiring chairs, teaching expectations of chairs and other faculty appointments, the impact of the program on retention or loss of faculty at their institution, on compensation, and on university priorities. Chairs were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the program, their teaching obligations, and demographic information not collected by the program. We received 41 responses from academic staff associations (a response rate of 63%) and 468 from Canada Research Chairs (a response rate

2

of 32%).

IV. Key Issues

1. Strategic plans

When the CRC program was introduced, universities were required hurriedly over the summer of 2000 to submit strategic plans that would guide decisions about their future CRC nominees. The Alternative Fifth Year Survey asked each academic staff association about the process followed regarding the development and approval of its institution's strategic plan. The findings were surprising. Only one in ten associations (9.75%) reported that their association had been consulted on the university's strategic plan. Even more surprising, in less than half the institutions (43.9%) did the university's senior academic body approve the plan in advance. A further 22% reported that their senior academic body was given the plan *after* it had been submitted to the Canada Research Chairs secretariat.

2. Appointment of Chairs

a) Consistency with collective agreements

A majority of associations (56%) reported that the process for selecting chairs at their institution was inconsistent with the appointment procedures spelled out in their collective agreements. Twenty-two percent of academic staff associations reported that they had negotiated a special appointments process for CRCs. Just over a quarter of

associations (26.8%) reported that the administration had controlled the appointments process entirely.

b) Consistency with equity policies

Barely a majority (51%) of associations indicated the CRC selection process was consistent with their institution's equity policies. Approximately a quarter of associations did not answer the question or reported that they were uncertain if the policies were followed as those appointed were overwhelmingly male or that the institution had failed to make a real effort to encourage women to apply.

c) Efficiency of the process

A substantial majority (87.6%) of chairs reported overall satisfaction with the appointment process, although many noted that the it was overly bureaucratic or that there were unnecessary delays on the part of the university or Secretariat.

3. Who are being appointed as Tier II Chairs – Rising stars or established academics?

A concern from the start of the program has been whether Tier II appointments would go, as mandated, to "exceptional emerging researchers" or whether universities would nominate more established academics. Responses from Tier II Chairs surveyed indicate that some appointments were made to

Table 1: Rank of Chairs Prior to Appointment		
Rank before CRC appointment	Tier I	Tier II
Full Professor	88.8%	13.1%
Associate Professor	3.5%	32.5%
Assistant Professor	0.0%	21%
Lecturer/Instructor	0.7%	2.4%
Post-Doctoral Fellow	0.0%	14.5%
Other	5.8%	16.5%
No answer	1.2%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%

researchers in the middle of their careers instead of to junior scholars.

As can be seen in Table 1, 13.1% of Tier II Chairs were Full Professors at the time of appointment and close to a third (32.5%) were Associate Professors. Table 2 shows that 43.2% of Tier II Chairs reported they had tenure prior to their Tier II appointment, and 11.7% were between 45 and 54 years old.

4. Equity

The CRC Program tracked only one designated group variable – gender – and the many have expressed concern that only 20% of the chairs have been awarded to women – 18.8% of Tier I Chairs and 24.3% of Tier II Chairs. No data were collected on aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, visible minorities or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered people.

Table 2: Tenure Status at Time of Appointment		
Tenured	Tier I	Tier II
Yes	87%	43.2%
No	8%	52.4%
No answer	5%	4.4%
Total	100%	100%

Table 3: Age at the Time of Appointment		
Age	Tier I	Tier II
25-34	0%	15.5%
35-44	13.5%	72.8%
45-54	46.5%	11.7%
55+	38.0%	0%
No answer	2%	0%
Total	100%	100%

Table 4: Age and Gender of Chairs		
Gender	Tier I	Tier II
Male	81.2%	75.7%
Female	18.8%	24.3%
Total	100%	100%

CAUT's survey included a demographic profile of respondents. Data on gender are very close to the CRC data as can be seen in Table 4.

Whatever the concern about the relatively small percentage of women who were awarded chairs, data from the survey of chairs reveals a very small number who are members of other equity-seeking groups (Table 5). Just over 9% are visible minorities; 1.92% identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered; 1.06% are people with disabilities and only one is aboriginal.

Table 5: Chairs from Equity-Seeking Groups				
Equity-seeking group	Tier I	Tier II	Total Number	Percentage of total survey respondents
Visible Minority	22	21	43	9%
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans-gendered	3	6	9	1.92%
Person living with a disability	5	0	5	1.06%
Aboriginal	0	1	1	0.2%

5. Teaching

When the CRC Program was first proposed, some government officials indicated that chairs would not have teaching responsibility. That position was quickly modified when university administrations and academic staff associations indicated their strong views that academic work involves teaching, research and service. Nevertheless, concern has been expressed as to whether CRCs would be expected to fulfill normal teaching obligations.

From academic staff association reports, a bare majority of universities (54%) *require* CRCs to teach at least one course per year. A substantial number of universities (39%) do not require the chairs to teach at all and the remainder do not have policy. Just under 10% of associations reported their CRCs have teaching obligations comparable with other faculty of similar rank

Most of the CRCs who participated in CAUT's survey are teaching courses, but their teaching load is lighter than standard faculty teaching loads.

Virtually all CRCs (almost 95%) report also supervising graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

6. Inequalities between institutions, disciplines, programs and researchers

a) Compensation

Most associations (70%) indicated that CRC compensation is consistent with the salary and other provisions of their collective agreements. However, many associations also reported that the CRCs get additional compensation: a stipend on top of regular salary (at 19.5% of institutions), a negotiated stipend as per their collective agreement (at 12.2% of institutions) or their agreement allows market supplements (12.2%). One association reported that "CRCs were paid on the salary scale but some were placed considerably higher on the scale

Table 6: CRC Teaching Loads		
Number of Courses Taught	**Tier I**	**Tier II**
0	**9.5%**	**6.5%**
1	**24.8%**	**26.2%**
2	**45.4%**	**38.1%**
3	**12.6%**	**20.3%**
4	**5.0%**	**5.4%**
5	**1.5%**	**1.5%**
6+	**1.2%**	**2.0%**
Total	100%	100%

than their peers. This was done to offer a salary differential to some of the CRC holders. There was considerable variation in the salary differentials offered."

Most associations reported no or minimal effect on salary structures overall, especially as the numbers of chairs are too small to have an effect on the whole faculty complement.

Nor did associations report that the CRC Program had a noticeable effect on the wage gap between men and women at most universities. Again, this may be a reflection of the numbers of chairs involved. A few (19.5%) reported that CRC salaries had increased the gap, as almost all CRC appointments at those associations have been male. Several associations were confident the processes they had negotiated to address salary anomalies would help correct any distortions arising from chair appointments.

Relatively few reported that CRC salaries have created salary inversion. A small number reported a greater salary inversion (22%). Most reported no effect (36.5%) or did not know (29.2%). Some indicated that the effects appear to vary among departments.

b) Distribution of resources

Associations reported the CRC Program had brought some additional resources to the university, but there were several concerns, including:
- Access to space
- Disparities between departments, faculties, programs
- Impact on humanities/social sciences

A typical response was that "the presence of CRC chairs in particular departments has led to a clustering of positions and research initiatives around those CRC chairs at the expense of a broader distribution of resources across the disciplines." Considerable concern was expressed about the impact on programs and research in the humanities and social sciences; for example, one association noted that "as most of the CRCs are in science departments (or 'arts' positions with a science/technology focus) this has added to the move towards science for campus resources and funding."

Space seems to be one source of tension. Typical responses included "precious office space given to CRC holders...."; "university administrations have topped up infrastructure and post docs expenses of CRC holder taking away precious funds from other departments"; "scarce library, lab, and research funds are now shared with CRC holders."

These disparities can have a negative effect on the faculty as a whole, as noted by some associations, e.g., "the focus on centres of research 'excellence' is demoralizing to many faculty who devote themselves to students, the institution, their research and service but are not recognized and then `stars' are brought in to work behind closed doors and take precious resources while departments and infrastructure are not renewed."

c) Variations by region and size of institution

The CRC allocation formula has favoured medical/doctoral universities as indicated in Table 7. Variation by region indicates that

7

Table 7: Allocation of Chairs by Institution Category			
Type of Institution	Tier I	Tier II	% of all F/T Faculty
Undergraduate	6.2%	10.1%	18.3%
Comprehensive	17.5%	17.6%	20.3%
Medical/Doctoral	73.3%	68.3%	55.6%
Other	3.0%	4.0%	5.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Quebec and Ontario have received more chairs than their percentage of all full-time faculty; while the Atlantic provinces and the prairies have received fewer. Alberta and British Columbia have received allocations in line with their respective percentage of full-time faculty (see Table 8).

Associations at some smaller universities reported that the CRC Program had allowed them to gain new resources that might not otherwise have been available to them, and some indicated that the program had freed up resources for improvements in infrastructure or the library.

However, as the resources may be directed solely to one academic unit or faculty, the CRC program has had unintended or unforeseen effects on universities' academic missions, by failing to address the need for resources and infrastructure in faculties or departments which do not benefit significantly from the CRC program, and by forcing universities to 'follow the money' without regard for sound planning processes.

7. Guidelines and standards

There were complaints from both academic staff associations and chairholders about the lack of transparency and clear guidelines in the

Table 8: Allocation of Chairs by Region			
Region	Tier I	Tier II	% of F/T Faculty
Atlantic	6.4%	8.0%	11.0%
Quebec	27.5%	27.4%	25.3%
Ontario	37.7%	36.6%	33.1%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	4.9%	5.4%	8.1%
Alberta	10.8%	10.4%	10.3%
BC	12.7%	12.2%	12.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

administration of the program – especially at the level of the university. There are significant differences in the way the program is administered at different institutions – in the use of the funding, the level of support for research, the attitude toward renewal, expectations of teaching and administrative work, and other benefits afforded to chairs. As one Chair noted:

"My experience suggests that the program was designed before administrators had thought of all the relevant aspects of the program. For instance, standards are vague and often variable among universities. Chair holders do not really know what outcomes they must achieve to be a successful chairholder. We were advised only this year that we could get a renewal, but the standard to reach in order to get a renewal remains entirely vague and subjective."

Another Chair said:

"In talking with other Tier II Chairs, it is evident to me that we have negotiated (or not) very different packages with our universities… the inconsistencies across the country are concerning."

In particular, many chairs reported dissatisfaction with the level of funding available for research costs and hiring once the university had deducted salary, infrastructure costs and other items. The program sets no standards on the amount a university can claw back. This is problematic for many chairs - particularly those who are not able to have access to Canadian Foundation for Innovation funding. Some felt that there were "too many loopholes for the University to re-direct money."

"After the University carve-out, the amount of funding available for the research program is minute."

"The CRC grant pays for my salary and the little leftover I use to try to cover my mandatory consumables to keep my lab alive. I am spending a big part of my time to find funding agencies. When I find one, they do not have enough money to pay for a postdoc . Insane! Or they tell me that I need an industrial partner who sponsors my research partly. How should a newcomer know industrial partners in Canada for sponsoring?"

The effects of the claw-back have been mitigated in some cases by CFI funding and revenue from the other granting councils, but some chairs report that the lengthy and arduous application process for all the additional sources of funding, as well as the additional administrative tasks that come with them, force the researcher to spend a great deal of time that was supposed to be going into their research on managing paperwork. The problem seems to be that there are no guidelines in place for how the money is to be handled and spent.

Variations in these factors differ not only from university to university, but also faculty to faculty and department to department in the same institution. All are due to the absence of administrative and financial guidelines. The gap between what was promised and what has been received has in some cases been so stark that some respondents have described themselves as having been 'naïve' and 'foolish' for accepting the CRC.

Our survey of faculty associations indicated another difference among institutions – in the

way they are using CRC appointments. Some are explicitly using CRCs to recruit researchers from elsewhere. Others award the positions to internal candidates or a combination of internal and external candidates. According to one association, "initially [the program] was deemed inappropriate to recruit other than outside talent, but later on the university recognized that some of their own academics should be given consideration or risk losing them as CRCs to other institutions."

Sixty percent of associations indicated the program had made it possible for their university to retain faculty they might otherwise have lost. A majority (56%) reported losing faculty to other universities as a result of the CRC program, and the same amount reported gaining faculty from other universities.

The pattern of gain and loss was described by one chair: "The CRCs put bodies in departments but this didn't necessarily lighten the load for existing faculty. Some faculty have left the university because the teaching and service load is too onerous, and resources are scarce."

8. Contingency plans

The survey revealed that few universities have developed contingency plans in the event the program is not renewed. Most associations were either unaware of a contingency plan in the event the CRC program is not renewed (48.7%), or reported that neither the Senate nor the administration had discussed or developed a plan (31.7%).

We received reports that concern about the long-term financing of the program had an impact on faculty renewal, such as the casualisation of academic appointments. As one association reported, "In the case of hiring 'other' staff, often these positions are not tenure/tenure track in order to hold the space for the CRC positions, if funding is lost."

Chairs also expressed some anxiety about the future of the program - especially Tier II Chairs, who can only be renewed once. Therefore Tier II chairs will have to apply to become Tier I Chairs, but there will not be enough vacancies to take them, nor has the program developed a process by which they could make the transition. This raises the fear of research having to be cut short or researchers having to relocate after years of networking and developing ties in the vicinity of the host university.

9. Additional comments

A majority of chairs (51.4%) cited funding and the link to the CFI as a strength of the program. Included in the strengths were the reduced teaching load and more time for research (23.2%), prestige and support for excellence (29.9%) and the support the program provides to university research in general (45.2%). A number of respondents indicated that the long-term nature of the chair provided a unique opportunity for stability and security to carry out their research – something that would be impossible under other funding schemes.

Academic staff associations highlighted the

need for government in future to consult with universities and academic staff associations before creating new programs. Many respondents felt that more direct funding to post-secondary education would be a better use of government resources.

Some associations expressed reservations about the "elitism" of the program – concern that it contributes to the creation a privileged class of professors, and that the "déplacement des ressources qui touchent éventuellement la liberté academique."

A Chair noted: "In my view the CRC programme has provided for a needed infusion of resources, however the manner in which it has been implemented (at least at my institution) allowed administrators to play too large a role in what should be a peer process."

Others recognized the inability of the CRC program adequately to address the challenges facing Canadian universities and researchers. As one Chair stated: "To be candid, I really haven't experienced this 'program' as a 'program'. I am suspicious of it as a 'program'. The universities need systemic support so that an individual scholar can create, innovate, and collaborate as they see fit. Although I have benefited from the CRC 'cherry-picking', I have no enthusiasm for it as the way forward for our universities."

Concerns were expressed that the program does not provide a net gain in faculty numbers. "These CRCs should have increased the amount of tenure/tenure-track positions on our campus - that hasn't happened." One observed that the money offered was not enough to attract some potential chairs. Another

suggested that universities' needs are not being met by this initiative: "Le programme devrait mieux tenir compte de l'ensemble des besoins (incluant l'enseignement et la participation interne) de l'université."

V. Analysis - Problems with the CRC Program

There are three broad areas in the design and implementation of the CRC Program that have been identified by CAUT and its member associations as problematic.

1. Equity across allocations and appointments: in terms of gender and other designated group characteristics; according to region; according to university size; and according to disciplinary allocation.

2. The management of the awards by host universities, including (but not limited to) development of the strategic plan to guide appointments, overhead or indirect fund clawbacks, salary anomalies, workload differences, and the manipulation of the Tiers.

3. Renewal, stability, and long-term planning.

1. The Problem of Equity

Women and other designated groups

Widespread concern about under-representation of women has forced the CRC Secretariat to deal with gender equity following its periodic self-studies. The Third Year Review was accompanied by Gender-Based Analysis undertaken by a different consultant.

Not surprisingly, both the Review and the Gender-Based Analysis reported that there were lower-than-expected profiles for women in "some specific subject areas"; namely, in the CIHR areas and Tier II Chairs in the SSHRC areas. In the latter case, this was seen to be a result of bending what was the stated goal of the Tier II Chairs (emerging researchers) toward more senior, and male, faculty. The lower rates in the CIHR fields was noted but not explained. The studies also concluded that there are no gender-based differences in success in the actual evaluation by the review panels of the Program.

The CRC Steering Committee responded to the Third Year Review by announcing its "dissatisfaction" regarding the nomination of women, and decided not only to continue to monitor gender-based nominations, but also to post results on the CRC website, and to post the gender-based assignment rate by university as well. This last assertion (with "by university" in bold and italics in the response paper) was clearly intended to show that the Steering Committee was prepared to use public pressure to embarrass individual universities into addressing the issue of gender-based inequity. The Steering Committee further insisted that universities submit updated research plans (used to frame and justify specific nominations) that would now include methods for dealing with gender-based inequities. Annual reports would be required to describe progress in this area. The Program also decided to review its own materials and publications, to see if they contained "disincentives."

While a single gender-based statistic does appear on the CRC website, it is not broken down by institution. Institutions' revised strategic plans, with specific proposals for addressing gender-based inequities fail, in many cases, to have specific proposals. Many institutions rely on the same sort of past practice (claiming they will monitor gender-based issues) that the Third Year Review deemed inadequate. One, for example, offers to "instruct search committees to consider the recommendations [to address gender-based initiatives] of the CRC Secretariat", while others talk about the need for more recruitment and monitoring. Some institutions' revised plans (due March 15, 2003) do not even mention gender equity.

When the CRC Steering Committee responded to the Third Year Review, it was apparent that one of the problems it faced in addressing gender-based inequities was the absence of any reference to this issue in the mission statements of the CRC Program itself. That silence in the Program mandate has meant that gender equity is, from the standpoint of the Program and its implementation, an ancillary and external issue.

The Fifth Year Evaluation was completed in December, 2004, and in July, 2005, the Steering Committee issued its response to the evaluation. The recommendation in the evaluation concerning gender equity called for increased monitoring. The Steering Committee, somewhat surprisingly, amplified the details as to what precisely ought to be monitored and how. Then, it expressed its dissatisfaction with monitoring, and identified

the Program's failure to remedy what the Steering Committee called a "persistent gender distribution problem." In order to confront the problem, they claimed, "the universities will be required to establish [distribution] targets [for female chairs] in their strategic research plans and their annual reports - or, in the case of institutions that have already established targets, review them." Failure to meet the targets will result in sanctions imposed by the Secretariat.

While the failure of monitoring is a striking admission and the threat of sanctions a new approach, there are reasons to think this may not be enough. There is no reference in the Steering Committee's response to any specific targets: to standards within the university (e.g. existing equity programs) or to external standards (e.g. those established in other federally-funded programs). There is no mention of how the targets are to be developed: no reference to Senates, or Academic Planning Committees, or other peer-review bodies. There is no reference to sanctions imposed in the event that a university refuses to adopt targets (and such refusals by individual universities can be found in the 2003 revised research and gender plans on the website).

There are no references to the deeper, structural problems identified in the Gender-Based Analysis of 2003, like the worsening of gender-based equity in the CIHR subject areas. There is no mention of the role historic inequities have played in disqualifying women for Tier I Chairs, nor how the tier system itself might perpetuate these inequities. Finally, there is no effort made to recognize the link

between equity and excellence, a link that clearly belonged in the original CRC Program mandate.

But if things are inadequately addressed at the level of gender equity, there is only silence for other equity-seeking groups. There has been no attempt to track the nominations for other designated groups, in spite of the fact that most universities have policies designed to address the employment of these groups. We find it extraordinary that such a serious matter is not addressed in either the Fifth Year Evaluation or in the Steering Committee's response.

Allocation formula

The Fifth Year Evaluation picks up on widespread dissatisfaction with the distribution of chairs by granting agency budget share. Specifically, the majority of universities polled claimed that the distribution was inconsistent with their own "research and hiring plans", which is odd, since the universities submitted strategic research plans in order to nominate candidates and apply for chairs. This reveals another hidden problem with the allocation and distribution of the chairs: that while these conflict with existing priorities set by universities through standard peer-review processes, universities are willing or forced to reinvent the priorities in order to meet distribution targets set by the Federal Government. This is a direct consequence of the shift in funding from standard operating grants, driven by locally-established academic planning priorities, to direct and directed research funding. The allocation of CRC

positions can distort the priorities of each institution because that allocation is a reflection of Federal Government decisions about priorities for research funding, and, as formulated, are indifferent to the priorities as established by individual institutions. The allocation can distort the priorities of each institution because it is a deeply conservative process: the past success in winning awards from the participating granting agencies establishes the institution's access to chairs, so any institution working to address the impact of historic cuts to SSHRC funding, for example, will find no support from the CRC Program, which merely assumes those cuts as a starting point. The deeply conservative allocation formula also means that the shift in emphasis toward private sector co-funding, a shift that biases even SSHRC grants towards technology and commercialization, is reinforced institutionally, in teaching and research positions. And of course, it provides another impediment for gender-based equity, as women are historically under-represented in natural science and engineering faculty positions.

The conservative allocation formula also has a negative impact on smaller universities and universities in the Atlantic and prairie provinces which have historically received disproportionately small shares of granting agency funding compared to their proportion of full-time faculty among Canadian universities. (See Table 8 above.) This is evident even when a smaller institution has distinguished itself among its peers. A case in point is the University of Winnipeg, which (as is noted in its strategic research plan, submitted to the

CRC Secretariat) stands at the top of grant-winning universities when its size is factored in (grant dollars per capita) . Nothing in the CRC Program provides for relative research excellence, let alone looks to introduce research culture in universities too small to reach the critical mass of researchers or infrastructure required to win federal research grants in any of the subject areas.

The formula also discriminates against universities without medical schools. York University was allocated 32 chairs, for example, while McGill, (with roughly the same faculty complement as York) received 157. Carleton was allocated 27 chairs while Queen's (with roughly the same faculty complement as York) received 54.

These problems with the allocation formula, as indifferent to size and region as it is to gender and other equity-seeking groups, may be why it is given some prominence in the Fifth Year Evaluation. Unfortunately, the Steering Committee response to this problem is perplexing. They begin with a comment that the allocation formula (i.e. the basing of the allocation on the percentage of the budget of the granting agency won in competition) should be reviewed. They acknowledge that the formula was indeed conservative: it was not to distribute research excellence to new places, or to re-distribute it, but rather to consolidate it where it was. They then acknowledge "a level of discomfort in the community." But they add that any decision to alter the formula, rests with the federal cabinet. The only decision the Steering Committee can make is to recommend to cabinet that the allocation formula be

altered.

"Steering Committee Decision 9" deserves, in this context, citation in full:

"The decision to request modification of the allocation of Chairs by discipline rests with members of the Steering Committee, who can choose to pursue this option with Cabinet."

Whether technically true or not, this is an abdication of responsibility by the Steering Committee to deal forthrightly with the problems of allocation which they acknowledge.

2. The Management of the Chairs by Host Universities

Institutional variation in the management of the CRC program is a result of the ambivalence of the program designers about centralized control and local decision making. Is this a federal program with key parameters set by the Federal Cabinet through the Steering Committee or is it a program designed to rely on the knowledge of individual institutions about their own needs and with the flexibility to be adapted by the institution to meet its need?

Many aspects of the program are directed from the centre – from unrealistic deadlines of initial strategic plans to the disciplinary breakdown of chairs. On the other hand, institutions were often left with unclear administrative direction so that there is considerable inconsistency in the treatment of chairs by different institutions.

The problem began with the hurried requirement that universities produce a strategic plan to guide CRC appointments. These plans were created over the summer of 2000 with little advance notice, and, in many cases, with less than normal or thorough consultation with faculty or the university senates.

For example, respondents describe difficulties with the absence of clear program prescriptions for teaching load and "administration" costs. The Fifth Year Evaluation identifies these as part of a more general problem, and the Secretariat responds by calling for a "performance management strategy." This, in turn, amounts to a fairly banal form of reporting: the self-study document notes that when host institutions apply for a chair, they describe what sort of support they would be willing to provide, and this information could, we are informed, be compared with the institutions' subsequent annual reports, to see if the commitments are realized. If this is the sort of change resulting from the report, one can only imagine the level of reporting and potential discrepancies prior to the evaluation.

With respect to salaries, there is nothing in the CRC requirements that forces host institutions to recognize existing collective agreements, and the chairs seem a prima facie invitation to market differentials: salary increases tied to prestige and demand, among other things. At the same time, there are no directions that might establish consistency across the country in the use of the chair monies for salary.

Another area of wide variability is the amount of teaching release time provided to the chairs to undertake their research programs. This was

an issue in the Fifth Year Evaluation, and in the Steering Committee's response. As with applications to the three granting agencies, the university merely has to state that the projects identified in the nomination have been read, and that adequate support will be given. There is variability because there is no need to specify details. Because there is no specific undertaking, the reporting and monitoring recommended by the Steering Committee may have little impact here.

Space, like teaching release time, is an element of the host institution's undertaking but without any requirement for a precise commitment. It is commonplace in academic life for grants to be signed off by research administrators with little or no serious commitment to what the researcher would deem adequate research space. Since few grant applicants specify exactly what is required, the host institutions are able to give them whatever is available without violating the undertaking. Generally, the additional funding envelopes that surround and often accompany CRC chair positions as "infrastructure support" are utterly inadequate to address the real space infrastructure needs at most Canadian universities.

Arguably, the money allocated to the CRC Program otherwise could have been allocated in increased transfers for core operating expenses (leaving universities to decide their own priorities) and through increased funding to the granting agencies. The associated infrastructure money provided through the Canada Foundation for Innovation could have been used to increase the provision for universities' indirect research costs. Because these options were not chosen, institutions have had to readjust their priorities to federal government priorities and have had to play the game of trying to get desperately needed infrastructure money in connection to CRC awards that constrain their use of it.

Institutions have used some of the "flexibility" of the program to muddy distinction between Tier I and Tier II Chairs: allowing institutions to select Tier II Chairs who are older, more established, somewhat less outstanding versions of the Tier I Chairs, instead of the junior scholars intended by the program.

The response document concludes its analysis of management concerns by promising to monitor the behaviour of host institutions even further, a promise whose likely efficacy can be measured by the dismay about monitoring in the same document's analysis of gender-based issues. Where monitoring means nothing more than linking promises and self-reported results, and seeking nothing more than correspondence between the two, critics rightly wonder where responsibility for a nationally funded and promoted program really ought to lie. Such worries are not likely to be allayed by a "performance management strategy initiative" that, in the fifth year review, suggests actually comparing what host institutions are doing with what they said they would do.

The problem is that the CRC Program has failed to give clear guidelines on key issues, such as equity, support for chairs, space, teaching obligations, respect for collective agreements. Institutional autonomy without an

appropriate program framework allows the CRC Steering Committee and the Federal Government to sidestep its responsibilities, implying the problem is at the institutional level and will be solved by better monitoring.

3. Renewal, Stability and Long-Term Planning

The second recommendation in the Fifth Year Evaluation speaks directly to the anxieties of many chair-holders, especially those in Tier II: it calls for the development of strategies for dealing with the non-renewal of the chairs, either through expiry (Tier II Chairs can only be renewed once) or re-allocation (according to the formula, the rise and fall of a university's share in the three federal granting agencies entails a rise or fall in the chair allocation, whether by discipline or overall). The response by the steering committee is, in effect, bracing: the chairs will expire or be phased out as necessary, and as mandated by the program's procedures.

What the response does not address seriously is the precariousness of the program as a whole, a creation of a federal cabinet that is itself never more secure than its term and its mandate. Nor does the response address the extent to which directed research funding, in the form of the creation of strategic research plans and chairs, has transformed strategic planning in universities and forced them to adapt sound curriculum and research development processes to contingent funding priorities. Chairs have been hired, labs and research networks established, and academic

programs modified or initiated, as a direct result of chair funding. Without the sort of commitment to found programs around chairs, described in the strategic research plans, many universities would have been unable to secure chair nominations. But this same willingness to alter the makeup of the university will surely be questioned if and when the chairs expire or are phased out. Will universities undertake to retain and fund the programs and positions, or will they allow the CRC Program to determine their behaviour? It would be a curious reversal of the sort of problems described above if the universities were now to claim that the CRC Program bound them to eliminate other positions and programs.

VI. Fixing the Problems: Recommendations

The CRC program has resulted in 2,000 new positions in Canadian universities and resulting long-term financial obligations faced by each institution with chairs. Universities must be assured that the program will be continued, as the financial and other consequences for individual institutions would be grave were the program and its funding to be discontinued. Individual chairs should be assured of continuing support as long as they qualify for the position.

> **Recommendation One:** *The Government of Canada make a commitment to indefinite continuation of funding for the Canada Research Chairs Program.*

Recommendation Two: *Tier I Chairs should be renewable until their retirement, and Tier II Chairs should be renewed as long as they qualify for the position.*

While continuation of the program is essential, reform of the continuing program is also vital. The most pressing failure of the program is with respect to equity. Two thousand new positions could have allowed Canadian universities to deal with a history of inequity in hiring. The CRC Program has allowed perpetuation of that inequity.

Recommendation Three: *The Government of Canada provide funding to create an additional 500 chairs to be awarded to women and members of other designated groups who meet the CRC requirements for Tier I or Tier II Chairs. As holders of existing chairs retire or leave their current institution, their positions will not be replaced until such time as the total number of chairs returns to the original 2,000 allocated.*

Recommendation Four:The CRC Secretariat should gather and publish data on the demographics of chairs – including data on the number of chairs in designated groups as specified in the Employment Equity Act.

A fundamental failure in the original design of the program was that the federal government abrogated to itself the setting of priorities for Canada's universities by arbitrarily deciding how many chairs would be in each disciplinary category. This decision-making from the top violated the long-held respect for institutional autonomy that is vital for excellence in university programs and development. Each university, through its normal academic decision-making process, should have the right to decide the areas of specialization of chairs allocated to it under the Program so as to ensure that the CRC Program reinforces institutional excellence, not serve to redirect universities to meet federal government priorities.

After removing the link to specific disciplinary categories, it no longer makes sense to relate the allocation of chairs to share of granting agency funding, as that would simply reintroduce favouritism for capital intensive research disciplines. As all full-time faculty in Canada are to spend 40% of their time on research, it is appropriate to allocate chairs to individual universities based on their respective share of all full-time faculty in the country.

Recommendation Five: *Allocation of the 500 new equity chairs, as well as all future chair allocations, no longer be governed by the Federal government formula (45% NSERC; 35% CIHR, 20% SSHRC) with each university's share dependent on its share of respective granting agency funding. Instead, chairs are to be allocated to universities based on each university's percentage of full-time faculty in Canada. The decision*

18

about the discipline of the chair should be made by the university to which it has been allocated in a manner consistent with its usual process of setting academic priorities for appointments through its senior academic body. The CRC Steering Committee will continue to review nominations but only to ensure that they meet the standards of the respective tiers and that the institution is complying with its obligations under the program.

Universities' strategic plans must be serious documents that are created in a consultative manner through their senior academic bodies – not documents thrown together over a summer to meet a federal government program requirement. Strategic plans must be able to be amended as universities decide to modify their priorities and must be consistent with the institution's obligations under its collective agreement with its academic staff.

Recommendation Six: Each university develop a revised institutional strategic plan, approved by the institution's senior academic body, and consistent with the institution's collective agreement with its academic staff association, to indicate its priorities for chair appointments. This strategic plan is to be filed with the CRC Steering Committee to inform its approval of nominations. Each strategic plan may be modified by the university's senior academic body in response to changing priorities and needs. Each modification is to be submitted to the

CRC Steering Committee for its information.

The Canada Research Chairs Program helped highlight limitations of university infrastructure due to years of under funding. Infrastructure problems were partially ameliorated by funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation to support Canada Research Chairs. But infrastructure problems are better addressed in a less ad hoc and specialized manner through an increase in the funding of indirect costs of research – thereby eliminating the problem of tied funding and allowing a more equitable and useful distribution of funds.

Recommendation Seven: Funding allocated to the Canada Foundation for Innovation to support infrastructure should be reallocated to the federal Indirect Costs Program to increase the indirect costs of research provided by the federal government.

Endnote

[1] Hickling Arthurs Low, Third Year Review of the Canada Research Chairs Program, November 6, 2002. Nicole Bégin-Heick & Associates Inc., Gender Based Analysis of the Canada Research Chairs Program, November, 2002; R.A. Malatest & Associates, Ltd., Fifth Year Evaluation of the Canada Research Chairs Program: Final Evaluation Report, December 2, 2004.

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