



# SSHRC Funding Crisis

JOHN SERVICE, Ph.D., CPA Executive Director

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) is seriously underfunded. This has been the case for many years. The situation becomes increasingly problematic as time passes and has reached a crisis point in 2002/2003.

To deal with the crisis, the SSHRC Council has taken the unprecedented step of seriously discussing the discontinuation of the research grants competition for next year if more money does not become available from the Federal Government in the next budget. Earlier we reported that SSHRC was going to restart the popular Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) Program, maintain a 41% success rate in the research grants competition, decline new strategic partnerships and put a hold on increasing graduate student support. The position remains the same except for the suspension of the research grants competition for one year.

Why is SSHRC considering this drastic action? It is because the demand on the Council grows and the resources to meet the demand do not grow adequately. This demand is fuelled by the increasing number of new faculty needing research support at the beginning of their careers. It must be remembered that SSHRC faculty number over 50 % of the university professoriate. Researchers who in the past have not applied to SSHRC because of the low success rates are returning to the fold. This demand trend will only increase over the next few years as faculty renewal accelerates.

The other two granting councils have funding issues as well. However, they are not as acute as those at SSHRC. The percentage of scientists who apply to the other two councils compared to the total number of eligible faculty is much higher than for SSHRC. The success rates of the other two councils is also higher for those that do apply. Grant sizes are proportionately higher taking into account research needs.

SSHRC doctoral student support is the lowest in actual dollar values and the percentage of students supported. Masters support is nonexistent while it is an important program within NSERC and CHIR. NSERC offers bachelor level student support. If SSHRC receives an adequate increase, it will allocate roughly \$125 million towards graduate student support. This will be a meaningful increase for doctoral students and the initiation of master student support.

The Government of Canada is “not convinced that the SSHRC community has made its case” for increased support. This has been the expressed opinion of some important politicians and officials alike. This position is alive and well in Industry Canada, the Federal Department responsible for SSHRC, and in Finance Canada. In fact, Finance Minister John Manley and Deputy Minister Kevin Lynch both recently occupied similar positions at Industry Canada.

CPA is working hard with the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada to “make the case” in order to correct this chronic and historical under funding of SSHRC. To right the ship, the Council is requesting an increase of \$325 million over three to five years to put it on the same footing as the other two councils. This increase will move SSHRC funding from \$175 million to \$500 million per year. This amount will be adequate but is less than the annual allocations to NSERC or CIHR.

Highly qualified personnel (HQP) are at the heart of a successful society and a successful economy. Social sciences and humanities graduates have excellent skills sets that are indispensable to research, government, social policy, productivity, innovation, business and industry. Imagine Canada without psychology, law, business administration, economics, history and so on.

We need everyone’s help, scientist, nonscientist, SSHRC researcher, non SSHRC researcher etc. Collective action helps us all. Science supports practice and practice supports science.

There is a post card on the CPA site. Please complete it and send it to Industry Minister Rock and your local Member of Parliament. Directions are available on the site. Please consider visiting your MP over the summer to discuss the SSHRC situation.

Letters to Prime Minister Chrétien with copies to Industry Minister Rock and Finance Minister Manley would also be very helpful. See the CPA web site for more information. Please become involved. We all need to pull together to support SSHRC.

*This article was first published in the Summer 2002 issue of Psynopsis.*