

**Institute for Social, Behavioral and Economic Research (ISBER)
An Organized Research Unit (ORU) of the University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB)
External Review, May 4-5, 2015**

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Summary and Recommendations

The committee members visited the UCSB campus on May 4th and 5th 2015. During the visit we met with the Vice Chancellor for Research, Michael Whitherell; Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Tim Cheng; Executive Vice Chancellor, David Marshall; Melvin Oliver, Executive Dean, College of Letters and Science; Stuart Sweeney, ISBER Director; and many others, including ISBER Investigators and Advisory Committee members, Center/Program/Outreach Directors and Administrative/Technical staff. The committee was also provided with supporting documents regarding the history and current scope of ISBER's activities that inform this report.

In this section, we summarize our findings. The sections that follow elaborate on several key issues. We begin by quoting from the documents provided to us: "ISBER's primary mission is to facilitate and enable social science research... by providing: (1) efficient pre-award through post-award grants administration, (2) research development assistance and stimulation through consultations and a small grants program, and (3) high level research services that are most efficiently delivered through an ORU to a broad audience of faculty, researchers and graduate students."

We strongly recommend that UCSB continue ISBER as an Organized Research Unit. We also believe that it needs additional resources if it is to continue to operate as effectively as it now does, given the likely expansion of grant opportunities due to the designation of the university as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

However, given ISBER's structure, we are not optimistic that it can and do not recommend that it should assume a leadership role in furthering social science research on campus. The required leadership must come from the Dean and the Directors and faculty investigators of the successful research centers for which ISBER operates as the ORU. For example, several faculty investigators with whom we spoke seemed content to conduct smaller-scale research projects that could be carried out with modest amounts of internal funds. Given these views, an expansion of external research requires the recruitment of new faculty and an infusion of resources in a way that enhances collaborations and the willingness of new and current faculty members to take on the risks and responsibilities of larger-scale programs of research.

We have the impression that the university administration is fully committed to supporting the overall campus research mission, but the extent of the commitment to providing resources to expand social science research was not clear to us. However, it is clear to us that the expansion of social science research requires not only the engagement of the Dean of Social Science and many faculty members but also the commitment of additional resources from the Chancellors.

Almost all of the social scientists we spoke with viewed the primary mission of ISBER as *administrative support for social science research* generated by faculty members and/or research centers. Everyone praised the quality and efficiency with which the ISBER Director and staff provide “efficient pre-award through post-award grants administration, research development assistance and stimulation through consultations.” However, there is also the recognition from faculty and our committee that ISBER is currently severely understaffed, in part because of the increased number of centers and programs served.

We did not hear a strong demand by faculty for an expanded role for ISBER in research methods training, even though there was a broad consensus that research methods could be strengthened and expanded across the campus. Thus, we do not endorse the development of an ISBER Social Science Research Methods Unit. Some of these services are already being offered by the Broom Center, and expanded training in research methods might be offered by Broom or other Centers or social science departments. Again, ISBER does not have the resources or capacity to develop a Social Science Research Methods Unit. It will also require engagement from faculty across the social sciences and the commitment of additional resources from both the college and university levels.

The external review committee did not review the quantity and quality of specific research grants and articles that were produced by grants and awards administered by ISBER, but we are confident that the profile of the social science community could be raised if the appropriate research structures, incentives and resources could be expanded.

We commend ISBER and its Director for the recent changes that have been put into place. These include the recent provision of the Qualtrics facilities for researchers from many campus units and the launching of the secure computer server for the social science community.

The external review committee members applaud the forward-thinking leadership displayed by the director, Professor Stuart Sweeney. For example, we endorse the systematic review of centers that he has undertaken with the goal of closing centers that are underperforming. We recommend that the reviews of existing centers be expedited and that they be conducted in the order in which they were last reviewed. There are several excellent centers, but overall there are too many centers for ISBER’s resource base. Its scarce resources should be provided only to the centers that are performing well.

Our discussions raised concerns regarding the role and importance of the outreach programs administered by ISBER. The ISBER administration and its faculty advisory committee do not consider these programs as central to the ISBER mission. At the same time, it was not clear to us why these outreach programs are being handled by ISBER as an ORU, given that they do not promote social science research. This issue should be revisited, as there is a need for a campus-wide commitment, beyond ISBER, to these important diversity programs. However, ISBER does not now have the capacity to absorb the additional demands of the new programs that may arise from the recent designation of the campus as an HSI.

In concert with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, the Office of the Dean should ensure that ISBER continues to effectively manage and administer a portfolio consistent with an overall vision for social science research on the campus. The years ahead will be challenging ones, in part due to declining social science research funding from the federal government. Nonetheless, UCSB can contribute to the advancement of the social sciences by (1) conveying the importance of externally-funded research; (2) promoting opportunities for social scientists to work collaboratively with colleagues from other disciplines; and (3) ensuring opportunities for the researchers, administrators and others with social science responsibilities to communicate their concerns, needs, and aspirations.

The Dean of Social Science

As mentioned above, there are two preconditions that would accelerate research in the social sciences at UCSB. First, it requires an overall vision for specific areas of research excellence; second, it requires additional resources for research infrastructure. Success will depend heavily on the interests and perspectives of the senior social science faculty.¹ Because the Office of the Dean is responsible for recruiting, rewarding and recognizing faculty productivity, that Office should be at the center of these building efforts. For the Dean's Office to operate effectively, it must have resources sufficient not only for hiring new faculty, but also resources to ensure that those hired have the infrastructure to apply for and carry out externally-funded research. ISBER constitutes only one part of that infrastructure. For example, our conversations revealed both a shortage of laboratory space that constrains the ability of faculty to generate new federal grants and the Dean's lack of resources to support new research programs.

The Broom Center represents one successful example of the expansion of social science research. It appears to be a center of excellence and can serve as a model for multi-disciplinary social science research and training. But, we note that the development of this Center is due, in large part, to the Dean's success in raising a private endowment, recruiting new faculty, and energizing faculty from several disciplines. We expect that the Dean will continue to pursue opportunities for private funding of social science research. However, there are many promising research areas, especially in the short run, that will require resources for seed grants and

matching grants, and if these opportunities are to be realized, additional funds from the University Administration should be made available to the Dean.

Outreach programs at ISBER and UCSB

We spent considerable time assessing the range of contributions of the various Centers, Programs, and Independent Scholars that are now affiliated with ISBER. We were concerned that the mission of the programs and independent scholars, some quite distinct from the research mission of ISBER, dilutes ISBER's potential to serve as “the intellectual and administrative home for research in the social sciences” (ISBER self-assessment, p. 1).

These programs (sometimes referred to as outreach programs) did not appear to our committee as contributing to ISBER's research and administrative mission in the social sciences. The affiliations of the student recruitment and retention programs were largely unknown to several members of the ISBER Advisory Committee (nor are they represented on the Advisory Committee). While it is a tribute to ISBER's administrative prowess that student recruitment and retention units seek an administrative affiliation with ISBER, we conclude that these units – or their broader missions – are more appropriately located elsewhere on the UCSB campus. ISBER is not designed to lead these types of units and their presence makes it more difficult for ISBER to promote the expansion of UCSB social science research.

The category of “programs” is heterogeneous. It includes three student recruitment and retention programs (the McNair Scholars Program, the Office of Educational Partnerships, and the MESA Program) and two research-focused units (the Health Data Research Facility and the UC Educational Evaluation Center). It was not clear why the research-focused programs were not structured as Centers under the direction of UCSB faculty or researchers. By treating them as Centers, they would be subject to the recently-implemented periodic review process and would be better integrated into ISBER's scholarly mission.

We did not speak with affiliates of the UC Educational Evaluation Center. Consequently, we do not have a clear sense of its mission and how it contributes to ISBER and whether this unit would be more appropriately housed in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education.

We emphasize that we value the importance of these outreach programs to UCSB and, more broadly, to the University of California. As the first AAU institution to receive recognition as a Hispanic Serving Institution, UCSB is in an important position to shape how outreach and retention should be done for the next generation of college students. UCSB will be looked to as the model for outreach and retention at AAU Hispanic Serving Institutions. Centralizing these outreach and retention programs at the campus level as part of the admissions and retention responsibilities of campus will ensure that they can grow, and better achieve their goals.

Should the decision be made to maintain the current administrative relationship, we strongly recommend a careful review of the administrative needs of the outreach programs and the administrative support costs they require to ensure that these programs pay for the ISBER resources they use. There seemed to be differing opinions about the degree to which the outreach programs competed for staff resources with the Centers, but since ISBER operates on a fixed budget, any expenditure of resources on outreach programs reduces its ability to provide support for social science research. As ISBER grows, it will need to ensure that it can continue to provide sufficient, and growing, administrative support, grant assistance, and grant management for faculty in the social sciences and for the ISBER centers.

ISBER Investigators

We were surprised to find that independent scholars (assistant researchers) were affiliated with ISBER but not with any existing Center. We recommend that the Dean of Social Science and the Vice Chancellor for Research and the ISBER Faculty Advisory Committee carefully review these appointments and not approve new ones. The independent scholars lacked colleagues and mentors that are required for successful career development. ISBER should provide the assistant researchers with appropriate institutional support, network development, and mentoring. Ideally, each researcher would be affiliated with an ISBER Center.

In order for ISBER to focus on its core mission, the research interests of ISBER-affiliated independent scholars should be social scientific, involved in the ISBER network and contribute to its collective vision. We were concerned that the assistant researchers we met seemed connected to ISBER only through its Director and were poorly connected to faculty and the ISBER centers. As is the case with the outreach programs, independent scholars who are unconnected to a research center distract from ISBER's core mission.

UCSB Social Science in Comparative Perspective

The quality of social science at UCSB is recognized both nationally and internationally. The recent World University Rankings places UCSB as 56th among the top 100 institutions around the globe. Of the ten institutions in the University of California (UC) System only two had higher rankings for the social sciences, UCLA, 9th and Berkeley, 18th; UC San Diego was 59th, UC Davis, 74th and UC Irvine, 87th. In the Academic Ranking of World Universities, UCSB ranks in the top 75 of 500 institutions for its record in the social sciences.ⁱⁱ

College Factual ranked the Department of Sociology at UCSB as first in the nation, based on the large size of the program, the range of courses offered, and the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum. This ranking, however, is not based on the quality or quantity of social science research.

It is the research profile that our committee was asked to consider. The National Science Foundation (NSF) report on research expenditures in the social sciences shows that in 2013, four UC campuses spent more on research than did UCSB.

The NSF publishes expenditures for three disciplines (see Academic Institution Profiles for 2013-14) – economics, sociology, political science – and a fourth category, “not elsewhere classified.” A larger fraction of the expenditures at UCSB fall into the fourth category than is the case at institutions with prominent profiles in social science research. The differences reflect the significant representation of anthropology at UCSB and the more limited representation there of economics, sociology, and political science.ⁱⁱⁱ

With reference to sources of funding, UCSB does not differ significantly from several institutions we selected for comparison. For this group, the federal government is a larger funder of social science research than the home institutions and the non-profit sector. In 2013, federal dollars accounted for over 60 percent of social science expenditures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and 50 percent at the University of Michigan – two leading universities for social science research. In that year, federal expenditures represented 43 percent of total social science expenditures at UCSB.

Research awards made by the federal government are larger than those from other sources, especially awards from internal funds. According to the ISBER report, the social scientists it supports draw heavily on intramural funds, not just to seed projects but for support for entire projects. We recommend that UCSB consider how leading institutions use their internal funds as leverage to generate a greater number of larger federal awards. This might require ISBER to change the way it distributes small grants.

Lessons from experiences elsewhere are relevant. The Social Sciences Grant Support activity at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) administers seven interdisciplinary research centers but not, apparently, non-research programs. Leading institutions deploy more than one ISBER-like body to build their social science research programs—for example, the Berkeley campus reports that its social science research infrastructure includes more than 100 organized research units.

Conclusion

We conclude that the activities undertaken by ISBER appear to be well-aligned with its stated mission--to facilitate and enable social science research, particularly through assistance to researchers and effective administration of grants. We also conclude that the acceleration of research in the social sciences at UCSB requires engagement and resources that are beyond the scope of ISBER’s resources and capabilities. We are confident that with increased financial

support from the Dean and the University, the research portfolio in the social sciences, which now lags that of peer institutions, could be significantly raised.

ⁱ The Division of Social Science at UCSB differs from what occurs elsewhere. The UCSB Social Science units include Anthropology, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, Chicana and Chicano Studies, Communication, Economics, Exercise and Sports Studies, Feminist Studies, Global and International Studies, Military Science, Political Science, and Sociology.

ⁱⁱ *Times Higher Education* is the source for the information on World University Rankings. The other international comparison comes from *Academic Ranking of World Universities*, sometimes called the Shanghai Report. UCSB quite proudly touts the high ranking its Engineering program received in the latter publication.

ⁱⁱⁱ The classification for social science is not always consistent from one compilation to another. The World University Rankings includes these as social science fields: Area Studies, Anthropology, Biomedical Social Science, Economics, Ethnic Studies, Law, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, Education & Educational Research, and Geography. Quite commonly, institutions include Psychology in the group of social and behavioral sciences. In the NSF data, Psychology is not counted among the social sciences.