

Professor Amanda Davies
School of Social Sciences
The University of Western Australia

Dear Professor Davies,

Re: School of Social Sciences Proposal for Change Consultation Paper

I write in my capacity as a graduate in Anthropology of the University of Western Australia (UWA), graduating with a PhD in 1990, and as an Applied Anthropologist with more than 40 years' experience in the field. Though for several decades I have worked as a consulting Anthropologist in the areas of Aboriginal Heritage and Native Title, my work experience includes research and evaluation in social work, housing and homelessness, juvenile justice, foster care, child day care, community relations, work organisation in heavy industry, employee participation/industrial democracy and community economic development. I have been able to work across these diverse substantive areas because of the outstanding foundational education in Anthropology and Sociology that I received from the Department of Anthropology under the stewardship of the late Professor Ronald Berndt. The foundations developed by Professor Berndt have been built on by his successors. The Department of Anthropology/Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology is highly regarded both nationally and internationally and has over the years brought considerable kudos to UWA.

Since graduating I have been a part-time and guest lecturer at several tertiary institutions and an external examiner for Curtin University, where for several years I was also an Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages and a member of the School's Advisory Committee. I am currently an external supervisor of a PhD thesis in Archaeology at UWA.

My consultancy businesses (McDonald, Hales and Associates; and Ethnoscience) over the past 33 years have employed or engaged on contract more UWA Anthropology and

Archaeology graduates, including several people with PhDs and Masters degrees, than any other private sector organisation in Western Australia. Indeed, I currently have a UWA Anthropology PhD undertaking a research contract for me, though I should add that he has come out of retirement to assist me. I am actively engaged in several professional Anthropological associations within and without Australia. I believe, therefore, that I am well placed to address issues concerning the state of Anthropology in Western Australia and the role of the Discipline at UWA.

I acknowledge that all universities today face serious financial challenges, and that in this context all educational programs are being scrutinized, along with other operational areas. However, in my judgement, the University's proposal to abolish the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology and to discontinue its majors is unfair, short-sighted and based upon inadequate research and consideration of the likely impacts on the University's reputation and its future appeal. The proposal to have a School of Social Sciences without the key Social Science disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology is, in my view, both preposterous and short-sighted. It is unlikely that the broad range of research currently undertaken in the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology and the qualitative methodologies routinely employed will be equalled in other disciplines in the School, as Anthropology and Sociology provide a unique approach to social issues. I wonder, for example, where the ground-breaking and fascinating ethnographic research that Dr Richard Vokes is undertaking with scientific teams in the Antarctic will fit in the proposed new research scheme. The proposal acknowledges that social sciences nationally and locally are facing challenges and 'are at a crossroads', highlighting the structural changes in funding and the increasing emphasis on STEM and so on. It then notes 'clear opportunities for the social sciences and lists a range of areas that arise out of present life challenges that we all face'. Yet at the same time it ignores the sort of research that is currently being conducted in the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology which already addresses several such issues. The Discipline's research, it would seem, is acknowledged to be above world standard and the Discipline's level of external funding is more than equivalent to the other Disciplines in the School apart from Geography and Archaeology. Additionally, my colleagues in the

Discipline dispute the figures given in the proposal for the decline in student enrolments. One wonders why Anthropology and Sociology are being targeted. Both enrolment numbers and research funding wax and wane over time. It is not too long ago, as I recall, that Geography was similarly targeted for closure. Now apparently it is booming.

The proposal suggests that new programs in the School will provide support “needed to drive an improvement in student experience and student employability”. This statement fails to acknowledge the quality of the existing student experience with the Discipline about which I have regular feedback from students. It also ignores the current employability of Anthropology and Sociology graduates. There is currently a shortage of Anthropology graduates, and my business is having difficulty in finding suitably qualified people to fill a number of roles. It would seem to me that what is required is support for the Discipline to improve enrolment numbers rather than its elimination. The proposal mentions a view to developing a ‘Social Science Skills Passport’. It would seem that the School is unaware of, or ignores, the current discussions between the Anthropology profession and the Discipline to develop an ‘Anthropology Skills Passport’ to mirror the development in professional Archaeology. The proposal also ignores the transferability of ‘applied social science skills’ that the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology already provides. Anthropologists and Sociologists work across a wide range of research and policy areas. The contribution of two UWA Anthropology PhDs to alcohol and drug research at the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University comes readily to mind, one a former classmate and the other, a former employee of mine. There are numerous other examples of the contributions made by graduates of the Discipline.

In a recent media statement, UWA has also noted the establishment of a major in ‘Indigenous knowledge, history and heritage’ that draws directly on the experience and knowledge of staff from the School of Indigenous Studies, covering ‘much of the space’ Anthropology ‘used to occupy’. This statement conflates Anthropology with Indigenous Studies. Rather Anthropology has a broad comparative focus on humankind, including Aboriginal Anthropology. This broad comparative focus has always been reflected in the teaching of Anthropology at UWA and in the space it continues to occupy. While

Indigenous Studies is an important component of the courses UWA offers, suggesting that it is equivalent to Anthropology is as ludicrous as suggesting that Irish or Celtic studies are equivalent to Anthropology in Ireland or that Sociology in France is no longer relevant because there are French Studies.

Certainly, with respect to the State's existing Aboriginal heritage legislation Indigenous Studies' courses on heritage cannot replace anthropology, as anthropology and ethnography are embedded in the Act, and one cannot fully address core features in the legislation unless one has qualifications in Anthropology (e.g., s39(2)). Though the proposed new Aboriginal Cultural Heritage legislation, which may be submitted to Parliament this year, does not have the same focus, my clients, who include several major Aboriginal organisations and several of the country's foremost resource companies, as well as smaller businesses involved with urban and infrastructure development, will continue to require independent professional Anthropological advice and scientific assessments. Anthropology will also continue, as it has for more than 25 years, to play a vital role in the Native Title space. My clients, and other stakeholders that I am aware of, are totally dismayed by the proposal to discontinue Anthropology and Sociology. Industry and Aboriginal organisations are already deeply concerned about the decline in the numbers of Anthropologists. The prospect of a further decline after the closure that the Discipline is a matter of grave concern. Curtin University, which has a small Anthropology component, cannot make up the shortfall.

It is interesting that though the proposal highlights the place of Archaeology as a flagship research area in the School, the proposed closure of the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology is opposed by UWA Archaeology and has caused much disquiet among the Archaeological profession, including the two key organisations, the Australian Archaeological Association and the Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists. Archaeology provides but one aspect of the assessment and interpretation of Aboriginal material culture, including rock art. Anthropology provides the other. I routinely work alongside and collaboratively with archaeologists and Aboriginal people in the recording and assessment of archaeological material. I am currently working for the local Aboriginal community on the Anthropological aspects of a major resource development that UWA



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Archaeology is also involved in. The closure of Anthropology and Sociology will inhibit a key aspect of the work of Archaeologists.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the School's proposal. I hope the School will reverse this short-sighted decision.

Yours sincerely

Edward M McDonald

Dr Edward M McDonald

Ethnoscience

July 19, 2021

cc: Hon. Robert S French, Chancellor, The University of Western Australia

Professor Amit Chakma, Vice-Chancellor

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