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Hon Robert French AC
Chancellor
The University of Western Australia
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Dear Chancellor

I wish to add my voice to those who are quite appalled by the only just announced provisional decision of the University to scrap the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology as part of its restructuring with the School of Social Sciences. Having been a senior public servant I well know how the long-term financial structures of an organisation have to be stabilised; yet this decision seems to be a bad one because it wipes out a discipline for which UWA has been justly recognised throughout the world since it was established by Professor Berndt in the 1950s. In our view, anthropology, in particular, is part of this university's essential fabric.

After I retired from full time work I was able to undertake doctoral study in anthropology and although the degree was undertaken at Charles Darwin University I was allowed to become an informal part of a very talented cohort of young men and women studying at UWA – and to take advantage of an equally talented group of professional teachers. After this I was invited to become an honorary research fellow in the Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology. I would like to think this was a mutually beneficial arrangement because, at minimal cost to UWA, I was able to use the library. As well, the university gained financial advantage from my publications and other benefits, although not of immediate monetary value, from other contributions I was able to make, for example in presentation of seminars and as a course coordinator and tutor. That arrangement continued until late March this year when I was advised my appointment would not be renewed.

Although that seemed to be an unreasonable decision and I was disappointed by it, I am not writing about my own interests here, rather about a more broadly short sighted and ill-informed decision to now cut the supply of much needed social anthropologists

throughout Australia, but especially in the Northern Territory, north Queensland and here in WA. Through my continuing work as a consultant I am in a position to know how much the many statutory bodies and prescribed bodies corporate are crying out for anthropologists and whilst universities like ANU, Sydney and Melbourne can fill some of these needs why is it that, as a 76 year old, I am still working on a regular basis and it is difficult to recruit field staff?

Of course anthropology's reach is far broader than in the areas of native title, where by the way its work is still required after claims have been established and settled, and land rights generally; but it is in these specific areas where the expertise and training of anthropologists is needed. As one who has had wide experience in the native title area you would know better than me that, whilst lawyers play an essential part in settling claims and the voices of Aboriginal people themselves drive the process, it is also essential for the nation to have capacity to investigate the interests of various claimants as honest brokers. Moreover, as claims are established, there is an ongoing need for management and resolution of disputes on areas successfully claimed – just ask the many land councils about their needs for assistance when miners and others wish to carry out activities on Aboriginal lands. This is what anthropological training provides.

As many others attest, it is especially embarrassing that in a state where such needs are so manifest, if this decision prevails, there will be no further supply of this much needed workforce from its senior university. As I said above I have no vested interest in UWA, I am not a graduate from here, but to me it's a matter of shame that the anthropologists we need here in WA will now come from the eastern states – to a state that has every bit as many needs for the expertise anthropological study provides. The critical thinking needed to fuel this expertise does *not* come from courses in Aboriginal Studies or other humanities courses. These do not erase the critical importance of independent scholarship that has for so long been achieved in the discipline of anthropology.

The last point I wish to make is that, possibly unknown to the decision makers to this point, UWA Anthropology and Sociology is a hard won part of a world-wide network, through its journal, *Anthropological Forum*, teacher and research worker exchanges, and international visitors. Within Australia, the discipline has contributed significantly to the *Aurora* program, which provides much needed interns to work *pro bono* in native title organisations, land councils and other relevant organisations. As part of my honorary fellowship I interviewed applicants for 9 years, from 2010 to 2018, and I believe professors Richard Volkes and Katie Glaskin have continued to do this work. The collapse of Anthropology and Sociology at UWA would leave a big hole in this part of the supply chain, possibly causing it to etiolate away to nothing within a few years.

As I said at the beginning of this letter, I do understand the needs of the university to stabilise its financial structures but it is wildly short sighted to remove a vital discipline on the basis of falling undergraduate numbers. As others have pointed out, fashions wax and wane and I can predict that the retirement of people like me will leave gaps that

cannot easily be filled. Eventually anthropologists, already quite well paid, will be paid even better and more graduates will be attracted into this field. If the decision to abolish anthropology and sociology at UWA is allowed to stick UWA will not be part of the action and this university's overall reputation will suffer even more than it has already by your announcement. **Aside from anything else it would be the only Group of 8 university not to offer anthropology and sociology as disciplines in their own right, an extraordinary situation that would further damage UWA's reputation.**

I respectfully ask that you direct another look at how money can be saved without the wholesale gutting of important and needed disciplines.

Yours sincerely



CHRIS HAYNES

12th July 2021

cc. Senate members: Dr Nin Kirkham and Winthrop Professor Raymond Da Silva Rosa

Vice chancellor: Professor Amit Chakma

Head of School of Social Sciences: Professor Amanda Davies