



Policy Statement

UCGSA.04 EDIA and the Value of the Social Sciences and Humanities

Policy ID: **UCGSA.04**

Category: **Accessibility/Professional Development**

Jurisdiction: **Provincial and Federal**

Adopted: **July, 2025**

Last Reviewed:

GSA Principles

The Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary believes in creating an educational experience that is engaging, fulfilling, and accessible to all.

Summary

Arguments equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives, as well as the social sciences and humanities, have increased in recent years. For graduate students, this conversation has included accusations that research funding is invariably biased against certain political viewpoints and that a social science or humanities degree is, at best, worthless and, at worst, actively harmful to Canadian culture.

The University of Calgary Graduate Students' Association (UCGSA) remains committed to ensuring individuals from all backgrounds have an opportunity to access and thrive within Albertan graduate programs. We also believe that all degree streams—whether they are fall within the umbrella of the social sciences and humanities, natural sciences and engineering, or medical research fields—are essential for creating a knowledgeable, prosperous society. We especially believe that, at a time where our members are demanding more post-graduation employment opportunities and Canadian businesses are scrambling for top domestic and international talent, that the “culture war” is a distraction our economy simply cannot afford. As such, the following Policy Statement addresses some common criticisms made EDIA and defends the value of social science and humanities degrees.¹ The former does not lead to an education system awash in left-wing thought, while the latter is essential for ensuring that Canada can adjust to a dynamic, competitive global market.

Concerns

Part I:

¹ This is to say, we are not singling out social science or humanities degrees as *more* important than other degrees. We are only responding to oftentimes politically charged arguments that these degrees are “useless.”

Introduction

Research Funding in the Current Political Climate

Before the prorogation of Parliament,² the federal Standing Committee on Science and Research (SRSR) had commissioned a study on the “impact of the criteria for awarding federal funding on research excellence in Canada.”³ Put differently, this study was intended to produce a report which examined how the criteria for federal granting agencies—including, but certainly not limited to, graduate student scholarships and grants used by faculty to pay student researchers—affected the quality, and quantity, of academic research. In theory, this would include investigating alternative *curriculum vitae* (CV) formats, the availability of feedback for applicants, and the level of stakeholder (including graduate student) involvement in the creation of granting agency rules, as detailed in the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations’ (CASA) brief to the committee.⁴

Ultimately, however, the conversation was dominated by concerns over Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) requirements within the granting process. Multiple briefs were submitted that criticized EDI as oppressive, discriminatory, misguided, or at odds with good scientific practice.^{5,6,7} There were witnesses, too, who dedicated their entire testimony to critiquing EDIA practices on similar grounds, even going so far as to suggest that universities should be defunded as a result.⁸ The crux of their argument was that EDIA created a left-wing bias in academia that threatened the integrity of science as a discipline. Alternatively, there were also witnesses and submissions who defended EDIA practices, arguing that properly designed EDIA would enhance both the quality and impact of science,⁹ and that important research related outcomes—such as the overcoming gendered and racialized inequalities in cardiovascular disease—require and EDIA lens.¹⁰ EDIA practices remain, in their estimation, an important counter to existing societal bias and ensure that researchers have access to diverse theories, datasets, and experiments.

The debate within SRSR, and particularly the focus on EDIA, is part of a broader backlash to progressive politics. Universities in both Canada and the United States have been center stage for most of this debate. For instance, the *National Post*, a conservative-leaning national newspaper,

² Occurred on January 6th, 2025.

³ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/committees/en/SRSR/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=12988426>

⁴ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13534170/br-external/CanadianAllianceOfStudentAssociations-e.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13533884/br-external/Jointly01-067-241216-034-e.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13512224/br-external/TremblayAndr%C3%A9-Marie-067-241204-041-e.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13512203/br-external/DummittChristopher-e.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/SRSR/meeting-113/evidence#Int-13047765>

⁹ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13525019/br-external/Coelmogen-e.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/441/SRSR/Brief/BR13531673/br-external/CoyleKrysta-e.pdf>

frequently has opinion columns and news stories criticizing EDIA and “woke” university policies.^{11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21}

At the provincial level, concerns over a left-wing bias in academia were cited as reasons why the *Provincial Priorities Act*, a piece of legislation which would require the Government of Alberta to sign off on any funding deals between the federal government and “proscribed provincial entities,” including universities.^{22,23,24} Particular attention was paid to the social sciences and humanities, with Premier Smith stating that only particular types of opinions were being funded by federal dollars.²⁵

This is not the only vector by which the social sciences and humanities are being attacked. As Andrew Gellman, a political scientist and statistician at Columbia University dryly asks, “the social sciences are useless. So why do we study them?”²⁶ The title of his blog post, while facetious, nonetheless captures a common attitude towards the so-called “soft” sciences and humanities: they are useless degrees with few job prospects and little practical contribution to everyday life. The backlash against EDI has added a new dimension: the social sciences and humanities are irreparably far-left and home to a radical “wokeness” that is out of step with the majority of public opinion.²⁷

A large portion of graduate students at the University of Calgary are from marginalized groups; additionally, a large group of graduate students study either the social sciences or humanities. The values of this organization support efforts to improve the inclusiveness and accessibility of graduate-level education for all; and we also emphasize the equal contributions to human knowledge from all degree streams, be they the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, and so on. Consequently, we believe the attacks on EDIA are misguided, and the neglect of the social sciences and humanities to be short-sighted.

¹¹ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/diversity-a-factor-in-all-university-hires-report>

¹² <https://nationalpost.com/news/university-of-alberta-ends-dei>

¹³ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/kenneth-green-our-universities-can-be-saved-but-we-must-reject-dei-first>

¹⁴ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/defunding-threats-will-not-be-enough-to-rid-universities-of-systemic-wokeism>

¹⁵ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/j-d-tuccille-dei-is-in-retreat>

¹⁶ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/canadian-universities-are-rotten-to-the-core>

¹⁷ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/leigh-revers-universities-better-get-prepared-for-poilievres-anti-woke-agenda>

¹⁸ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/j-d-tuccille-rampant-dei-nonsense-to-blame-for-the-chaos-seizing-higher-education>

¹⁹ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/jamie-sarkonak-the-academics-against-dei-movement-comes-to-life-finally>

²⁰ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/leigh-revers-universities-are-rebranding-dei-but-the-rot-remains>

²¹ <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/geoff-russ-ordinary-canadians-shouldnt-have-to-pay-to-educate-people-who-hate-them>

²² https://docs.assembly.ab.ca/LADDAR_files/docs/bills/bill/legislature_31/session_1/20230530_bill-018.pdf

²³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/danielle-smith-ideology-universities-alberta-analysis-1.7179680>

²⁴ <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/academics-fear-new-alberta-law-could-jeopardize-federal-funding>

²⁵ <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2024/alberta-research-control/>

²⁶ <https://statmodeling.stat.columbia.edu/2021/03/12/the-social-sciences-are-useless-so-why-do-we-study-them-heres-a-good-reason/>

²⁷ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/SRSR/meeting-111/evidence#Int-13027949>

As such, this Policy Statement is intended to do two interrelated things: the first is to argue against the notion that EDIA is actively hostile to good research and a functioning post-secondary system, and to argue that attacks against the value of a social science or humanities degree undermine the post-secondary system's ability to create the workers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers required for a complex, dynamic world. Political attacks against the social sciences and humanities for being either “woke” or “useless” are not grounded in reality, and are a distraction from other, more serious conversations to be had.

Part II:

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Funding of Canadian Graduate Research

Addressing the Criticisms of EDI

As stated above, critics of EDIA have accused its practices of creating a left-wing bias in academia. This left-wing bias, it has been argued, manifests in the requirements for new hires and approved research projects to adhere to EDIA criteria, which privileges left-leaning researchers and research projects over those on the political right. This bias is evidenced by the fact that more professors identify as belonging to the political left than that of the right, especially at “elite” schools.^{28,29,30}

However, having a sector be dominated by left-leaning individuals does not, in of itself, indicate that bias exists. If the dominant left-leaning views of professors were creating a problematic ideological bias in academia, we should expect to see:

1. That more education is associated with more left-leaning views, indicating that teaching in post-secondary was slanted towards left-leaning viewpoints;
2. That the returns to investment for possessing an advanced degree should be declining, indicating that business owners—who care only about maximizing shareholder value, rather than ideological concerns—are finding advanced education to be less valuable; and
3. That the number of federal funding opportunities are overwhelmingly slanted towards social justice projects or disciplines that centre social justice as the core of their academic activity, indicating that awards committees are rewarding like-minded researchers without due consideration to merit.

Additionally, if EDIA requirements were causing federal funding of research to be biased towards certain researchers, or certain types of research projects, we would expect to see:

²⁸ https://www.nas.org/academic-questions/31/2/homogenous_the_political_affiliations_of_elite_liberal_arts_college_faculty

²⁹ <https://ctse.aei.org/partisan-professors/>

³⁰ <https://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2024/10/duke-university-faculty-survey-political-leanings-liberal-conservative-moderate-centrist-harvard-yale-variation-across-school-tenure-status-demographics>

4. That EDIA statements dominate the merit criteria for projects, or that the merit of a research project includes an EDIA component; and
5. That EDIA considerations are incompatible with good data collection practices or literature surveys.

1. Is Education Associated with More Left-Leaning Political Views?

Contrary to popular belief, the answer is “no.” Higher levels of education are associated with more *socially* liberal views, but also more *economically right-wing* views, in effect meaning that higher education is associated with identifying as a classical liberal.

In the 2023 working paper “Compensate the Losers,’ Economic Policy and Partisan Realignment in the US,” the authors provide a compendium of survey data tracking Americans political preferences.³¹ Those with higher levels of education have consistently favoured more socially liberal positions—such as equal roles for men and women, abortion rights, and voting for a Black President—than the average since at least the 1950s, with no statistically meaningful change between then and now.³² The same is true for favouring economically right-leaning policy preferences—such as being against a jobs guarantee, wanting unions to have less influence, and spending less on welfare—more-so than the average American, with the only major policy preference change being steadily decreasing support for protectionist measures.³³

If the rise of “woke” ideologies were causing education to become more left-leaning, we should expect to see higher levels of education be associated with more left-leaning economic views. Additionally, we should see support for socially liberal positions increasing the closer we get to the modern era, when in fact there has been no statistically significant movement either way since the Eisenhower administration. The data, it seems, suggests that the dominance of left-wing views among professors does not translate to more left-leaning teaching outcomes.

Finally, it should be noted that this is American data. However, as Canadian philosopher Joseph Heath has pointed out, ground zero of the culture war is the United States, and Canadians are taking their cues from Americans more than the other way around.³⁴ It is unlikely that the data will be different for Canadians with advanced degrees.

2. Is the ROI on Higher Education Declining?

Businesses are supposed to be focused on maximizing shareholder value above all else. Markets, too, are supposed to efficiently distribute resources and talent to where profit opportunities are greatest. Consequently, in an efficient labour market, ideological considerations would be filtered out. In the realm of human capital generation, which is the most important role that post-secondary institutions play for labour markets, this would mean that a higher education degree would yield

³¹ Kuziemko, I., Longuet-Marx, N. and Naidu, S. 2023. “Compensating the Losers?’ Economic Policy and Partisan Realignment in the US,” *NBER Working Paper 31794*: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31794>

³² *Ibid*, pg. 70.

³³ *Ibid*, pg. 61.

³⁴ Heath, J. (Aug 30, 2023). “What I’ve Been Up To,” *In Due Course*: <https://josephheath.substack.com/p/what-ive-been-up-to>

lower dividends (i.e., future earnings) now than in the past if ideological bias had corrupted universities.

In the United States, where the culture war on campuses is much more intense, the opposite appears to be true. The Bipartisan Policy Centre has calculated that an education from 97.6% of public four-year institutions and 92.0% of not-for-profit private institutions provides a positive ROI, meaning that students earn more than they paid in tuition by attending those universities or colleges (by contrast, 51.7% attending a for-profit, private institution saw a positive ROI).³⁵ In Canada, the findings are more complex: according to RBC, the ROI from attending university in Canada is still overwhelmingly positive, though the earnings advantage has declined somewhat over the past few years.³⁶ However, the decline is driven by tuition hikes in engineering, architecture, and closely-related physical sciences, meaning that it is not “woke” ideology but, rather, the cost of these programs that is dragging down the ROI.³⁷

Finally, the assumption that businesses know what is best for their bottom line also means that they will pick the best possible hires, irrespective of other ideological considerations. Businesses place a great deal of value in hiring social science and humanities graduates, despite these degrees supposedly being awash in “woke” ideologies (due to space considerations, supplementary material to this point is available upon request).

Thus, here too the data suggests that higher education, regardless of whether faculty members are overwhelmingly left leaning, still produces economic value; and it suggests that the market rewards this value appropriately. It is possible, of course, that markets are not perfectly efficient and that businesses do not make hiring decisions irrespective of ideology. However, we would argue that this position is biting a very nasty bullet. After all, much of the supposedly “woke” research focuses on ways that bias impedes social equality in hiring and labour markets at large.

3. Is Federal Funding Overwhelmingly Slanted Towards Social Justice Projects?

The social sciences—particularly sociology, geography, social work, and urban or environmental studies—are frequently targeted for favouring social justice initiatives or left-leaning scholarship. To an extent, a similar accusation has been levied at English degrees, history, and philosophy. All of these degree streams fall under the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), which, according to data collected by CASA, awards merit-based scholarships to approximately 5% of graduates enrolled in a social science or humanities program.³⁸ Data from SSHRC’s public records can therefore help show which degree streams, and which projects, are most likely to

³⁵ Wielk, E. and Stein, T. (Apr 04, 2024). “Measuring the Return on Investment in Higher Education: Breaking Down the Complexity,” *Bipartisan Policy Center*: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/measuring-the-return-on-investment-of-higher-education-breaking-down-the-complexity/>

³⁶ Battaglia, R. and Xu, A. (Sept 09, 2024). “Proof Point: Financial Returns after a Post-Secondary Education Have Diminished”: <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/proof-point-financial-returns-after-a-post-secondary-education-have-diminished/>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Cameron, A.C., Kemle, A., Kucher, B.J., Walsh, K., Yaworski, H., Hunter, H., and Potts, T. 2025. “Investing In Innovators: Strengthening Graduate Student Research in Canada,” *CASA Policy Papers*. https://www.casa-acae.com/investing_in_innovators_publication. Pg. 18.

receive federal funding, and which percentage of graduate students are receiving funding from SSHRC.

As two PhD students from the University of Alberta show, the social sciences and humanities degrees that are frequently criticized for focusing on social justice above other scholarly activities receive, at maximum, equal amount of federal funds as management and business administration; many of these degree streams receive *half* as much funding as management and business administration.³⁹ Psychology and education have received the most federal funding from SSHRC since 2013/14, at 13.3% and 10.3% respectively.⁴⁰ In psychology, a total of 107 funding projects since 2013 have contained the keyword “critical” and 207 have included the keyword “justice,” keeping in mind that many of the projects focusing on justice do not approach it from a “critical theory” lens.⁴¹ That’s 107 out of a total of 12,875 funded projects since 2013, or **0.83%**. 1,591 out of a total of 110,842 SSHRC projects in that time included the word “equity” as either a keyword or part of the title, too: that amounts to just **1.4%** of all funded projects.⁴²

Note that many researchers in urban studies, English, or philosophy would dispute the notion that their research prioritizes social justice above all other scholarly activity (or that concern for social justice is incompatible with other scholarly pursuits). Even ignoring that counterargument, though, the majority of SSHRC funding flows to research projects in degrees that do not have this reputation. Nonetheless, it is not true that excessive federal funds are going towards social justice projects.

4. Does EDIA Dominate Merit?

The discussion in Point 3, above, states that social justice-oriented projects do not constitute anywhere close to the majority of federally funded research. Point 4 is focused on whether EDI *procedures* dominate the granting process above and beyond merit considerations. Even if the expert panels do not choose to fund social justice-oriented projects more-so than other scholarly activities, EDIA procedures dominating merit considerations could create problems in the future.

EDIA procedures, though, are not included in the merit review process for federal grants: reviewers are expected to complete an online module on unconscious bias, but they are not instructed or encouraged to see projects with no EDIA component or explicit EDIA research design as being less meritorious.⁴³ This statement is explicitly made, for example, in the application instructions for the Canadian Graduate Scholarship—Doctoral (CGS-D) competition; furthermore, while applicants are encouraged to think closely about how diversity considerations may impact their research, they are

³⁹ Ip, P.L and DeKeseredy, A. (April 17, 2024). “Alberta’s Bill 18: Who Gets the Most Federal Research Funding? Danielle Smith Might Be Surprised By What the Data Shows”: https://theconversation.com/albertas-bill-18-who-gets-the-most-federal-research-funding-danielle-smith-might-be-surprised-by-what-the-data-shows-228084?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20April%2018%202024&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20April%2018%202024+CID_59c23877511ceb1d9fe89d30c4ad1523&utm_source=campaign_monitor_ca&utm_term=Albertas%20Bill%2018%20Who%20gets%20the%20most%20federal%20research%20funding%20Danielle%20Smith%20might%20be%20surprised%20by%20what%20the%20data%20shows

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ <http://www.outil.ost.ugam.ca/CRSH/RechProj.aspx?vLangue=Anglais>

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/merit_review-evaluation_du_merite/index-eng.aspx

fully permitted to state that their research is not impacted by EDIA with no penalty.⁴⁴ Indeed, the evaluation criteria for SSHRC's Insight Grants not only has no mention of EDIA,⁴⁵ but there are no mandatory EDIA forms to fill out in the Application Instructions page, either.⁴⁶

This language is standard for most research applications: NSERC's guide to integrating EDIA into applicants research designs specifies that it be done "where relevant," for example.⁴⁷ SSHRC Partnership Grants also specify "as appropriate" in its guide to EDIA.⁴⁸ One exception is the New Frontiers Research Fund (NFRF), a strategic fund aimed at high-risk, international, and interdisciplinary research: their Best Practices guide uses stronger language about how funders must incorporate EDIA into their research practices (i.e., mentorship and recruitment).⁴⁹ These requirements do not, however, impact the merit review of the project itself, and the best practices are fairly non-intrusive. For research practices, most centre around applicants educating themselves about their colleagues and what obstacles to full participation they might face, with the most frequent lead-word being "consider" rather than something more forceful.⁵⁰ The research plan for NFRF applications, however, is much the same as other grants, stressing that researchers consider how EDIA might impact their research design when relevant.⁵¹

The way EDIA procedures are worded, then, does not appear to prioritize these considerations over scholarly merit. They also do not appear to be particularly forceful commands. Right-leaning researchers may interpret these rules as being at odds with their beliefs, but we do not believe that any anti-right bias is encoded in the rules as currently written.

5. Are EDIA Practices at Odds with Good Science?

As the NFRF Best Practices guide notes, EDIA approaches help make implicit assumptions explicit, improve data collection by gathering a more representative sample (in cases where population sampling is necessary), and push back against overgeneralization.⁵² These are all integral to ensuring that the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data about complex topics—especially when it comes to human societies—are as rigorous as possible. So long as EDIA procedures enhance these aspects of the scientific process, then EDIA is not only fully compatible with good science but is, in fact, an implicit requirement for conducting good science.

Some witnesses have claimed, though, that EDIA represents a break from the Western, liberal tradition. The claim is that EDIA practices, at least when applied to hiring, assume that knowledge is subjective—that is to say, cannot be verified objectively by other researchers—and closes off further inquiry by privileging the lived experiences of marginalized groups over that of replicable

⁴⁴ https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/guides/doctoral_postdoctoral_edi_guide-doctorat_postdoctorales_guide_edi-eng.aspx

⁴⁵ https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/insight_grants-subventions_savoir-eng.aspx

⁴⁶ <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/instructions/ig-ss/applicant-candidat-eng.aspx>

⁴⁷ https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Policies-Politiques/EDI_guidance-Conseils_EDI_eng.asp

⁴⁸ https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/guides/partnership_edi_guide-partenariats_guide_edi-eng.aspx

⁴⁹ <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx>

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

data. Most supporters of EDIA would greatly dispute these claims: the focus on systemic biases, and the encouragement of marginalized persons to share their personal experiences, is in part to build empathy and understanding. But it is also worth point out that the first claim—that knowledge is subjective and cannot be objectively verified by external researchers—is, in fact, a well-established position in the Western philosophical tradition. Indeed, according to one of the most impactful thinkers of the modern era, this position has deep ties to the Scottish Enlightenment, and thus to the classical liberal tradition as a whole. This was the argument put forward by Friedrich Hayek during his lifelong opposition to central planning.

Hayek argued, first in “The Use of Knowledge in Society”⁵³ and then in later publications such as *The Counter-Revolution of Science*,⁵⁴ that knowledge is widely dispersed and deeply subjective. He railed against those who assume that the most important forms of knowledge are explicit and technical; instead, he argued that there “is a body of very important but unorganized knowledge ... the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time or place,” leading to a situation where “every individual has some advantage over all others in that he possesses unique information ... which use can be made only if the decisions depending on it are left to him or are made with his active cooperation.”⁵⁵ Hayek would even go so far as to claim that, at least as far as the social sciences are concerned, this subjective knowledge is the core of what is being studied.⁵⁶ Other thinkers who remain well within the liberal tradition—such as Michael Polanyi,⁵⁷ Gilbert Ryle,⁵⁸ and Susan Haack⁵⁹—would either extend this position, or make similar claims, about knowledge as a whole. Importantly, though, Hayek considered this line of thinking to be a natural outgrowth of the Scottish Enlightenment’s focus of “spontaneous order,” with parallels in the works of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and David Hume. By contrast, Hayek argued that other forms of rationalism that assumed subjective knowledge was either unimportant or nonexistent—what he called “constructivist rationalism”—ultimately led to bureaucratic state planning, government control, and a devaluing of individual freedom.⁶⁰

Hayek may indeed be wrong about the importance of subjective knowledge, but it is nonetheless a position that is deeply embedded within the classical liberal tradition. Suggesting viewpoints that emphasize subjective knowledge are somehow a “threat” to science or liberalism is not only an offensive position to take, but it is patently incorrect as well.

Practical Benefits of EDIA

While we have focused on criticizing the narrative that EDIA is harmful, we would be remiss if we did not mention some immediate practical benefits of EDIA. The study of health inequality, for example, inherently asks questions around whether medical treatment, disease, and health risks impact individuals differently based on ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and socioeconomic

⁵³ Hayek, F.A. 1945. “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” *The American Economic Review* 35(4): 519-530.

⁵⁴ Hayek, F.A. 1952. *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason*. Carmel: Liberty Fund, Inc.

⁵⁵ Hayek, “Use of Knowledge,” pg. 521-522.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 522. See also *Counter-Revolution of Science and Laws, Legislation, and Liberty: Volume I, Rules and Order*.

⁵⁷ Polanyi, M. 1958. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵⁸ Ryle, G. 1949. *The Concept of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵⁹ Haack, S. 2009. “Six Signs of Scientism,” *Logos & Episteme* 3(1): 75-95.

⁶⁰ See *The Constitution of Liberty and Laws, Legislation, ad Liberty: Volume I, Rules and Order*.

status, and if the healthcare system is amplifying or adequately addressing these differences.^{61,62,63,64,65} This extends to research as well, where system biases have often left certain populations under analyzed. For instance, heart attack symptoms can vary by gender; since women were not used in my studies on myocardial infarctions, heart conditions in women have been frequently under or misdiagnosed.⁶⁶

Health inequality is not just an injustice faced by marginalized groups: it is also a drain on public resources and economic productivity. A 2016 report from the Public Health Agency of Canada estimated that health inequalities cost Canada's healthcare system \$6.2 billion every year.⁶⁷ A European Union study estimated that health inequalities ultimately reduce a country's GDP by 1.4% thanks to lost productivity.⁶⁸ This means that individuals who are otherwise not from a marginalized background nonetheless suffer when health inequalities proliferate. An EDI lens in healthcare delivery and, especially, healthcare research mitigates those economic costs.

The problems faced by marginalized groups can also create negative externalities for individuals from non-marginalized groups. A recent study on zoning found that restrictions on the development of multi-family housing is largely driven by racism, namely a reaction by white homeowners to increasing ethnic diversity in their communities.⁶⁹ While these restrictive zoning practices were originally targeted towards African-Americans, the long-run result of these policies has been the rapid increase in housing and rental prices due to a chronic undersupply of housing.⁷⁰ Put differently, *white* families are now suffering the effects of these zoning restrictions because a lack of density has priced out low-to-mid income earners from the housing market, regardless of their ethnic background. The upside of this finding is that, had there been a more concerted effort to fight racism in the housing market, the housing crisis faced by many large US cities would likely not have occurred.

Conclusion

While it is true that academics lean further to the left than general society, this by itself does not guarantee that post-secondary education is irreparably biased against right-wing beliefs. Furthermore, a combination of left-leaning professors and EDIA programs does not entail that EDIA is an active attempt to push out conservative thought from academia, nor that it has undermined post-secondary's contributions to the innovation ecosystem, particularly around the funding of research projects. If those claims were true, we have argued, we would expect to see certain

⁶¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5805104/>

⁶² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7869970/>

⁶³ <https://www.pcori.org/research-results/2021/rapid-review-racial-health-equity-and-social-needs-interventions>

⁶⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3388783/>

⁶⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3130513/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2024/02/09/the-slowly-evolving-truth-about-heart-disease-and-women#:~:text=Since%20heart%20disease%20was%20thought,Institutes%20of%20Health%2Dfunded%20research>

⁶⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/science-research-data/summary-direct-economic-burden-socio-economic-health-inequalities-canada.html>

⁶⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21172799/>

⁶⁹ Sahn, A. (in press). "Racial Diversity and Exclusionary Zoning: Evidence from the Great Migration," *The Journal of Politics*: <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/734261>

⁷⁰

trends—such as a noticeable shift in the opinions of those with university educations versus those without, or in the number of SSRHC scholarships awarded to “social justice” projects from graduate students—indicative of ideology dominating the way students, and graduate students in particular, learn. Part II of this policy statement lays out evidence that suggests these trends are not occurring.

In our view, then, the narrative that post-secondary education must abandon EDIA in order to save its soul is misplaced. There may indeed be a need for reform in the post-secondary sector, especially with regards to the criteria used to evaluate research projects, and said reform may require uncomfortable conversations around academic culture. But EDIA seems to us to be more of a distraction from these conversations than a vital component of them.

Part III

The Value (and Vulnerability) of the Social Sciences and Humanities

The Business Case for the Social Sciences and Humanities

The above section attempted to address the concerns that EDIA, and academia more broadly, constitute a left-wing coup of the scientific process. Included in those counterarguments was an observation that businesses do not seem to be rejecting recent university graduates. That observation is particularly pertinent for the social sciences and humanities, the so-called “useless” degrees. Businesses are, indeed, hiring new graduates and valuing their contributions to the economy, and social science and humanities students are benefiting mightily from the private sector’s demand for their labour. But this mutual partnership is vulnerable: funding priorities which view these degrees as less valuable—either because it is assumed they contribute less to innovation and productivity, or because the politicization of higher education has tarred the image of these degrees—risk undermining Canada’s ability to meet the demand for integral skills.

As such, Part III of this Policy Statement sets out to affirm that a social science or humanities degree is of great benefit not only to the degree holder, but to society more broadly. In today’s highly complex and integrated world, innovation and productivity, the cores of any prosperous economy, are not possible without a post-secondary system that values degrees from a social science or humanities background. The post-secondary sector *must* support these programs, because the private sector—not through malice, but due to basic economics—lacks the incentives to invest in the skills a social science or humanities degree confers, despite their importance. Not only must governments stop demonizing these degrees, but indeed, they should be supporting them to a much greater extent than they currently are.

Before elaborating on this, there are two points that must be made. The first is to reaffirm that the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, and other degrees are still vitally important to all aspects of the Canadian economy, be it contributing to innovation, developing patentable breakthroughs, and even organizing the productive process in efficient ways. We focus on the unique skillset that social science and humanities graduates bring not because these students are “special,” relative to their peers, but because the value of their degrees has been attacked by commentators and critics of universities.

Second, most scholars in these fields would argue that the value of their degrees is earned by advancing our knowledge of human systems, our history, our cultural products, and our philosophies. We do not disagree that studying the social sciences or humanities are valuable in-of-themselves. However, we also recognize that there ought to be some practical connection between an academic discipline and the advancement of humanity's material conditions—i.e., these degrees should also help produce things that let people live better lives. One easy to identify practical connection is identifying how these degrees are a benefit to private sector businesses, since success in this area is measured by how effectively organizations satisfy human wants and needs.

A Shift Towards the “Soft” Skills

Contrary to the stereotype of being a “useless” degree, businesses are increasingly extolling the virtues of possessing a social science or humanities degree. A Google search on the subject shows endless articles from senior managers and entrepreneurs stating that social science or humanities degrees are exceptionally valuable.^{71,72,73} Many of the top managers and entrepreneurs have degrees in those fields.⁷⁴ Indeed, the demand is high enough that a recent report from the United Kingdom argued their education policy was unprepared for meeting this need, stating that businesses recognized the value of these degrees, but government policy was lagging significantly behind.⁷⁵

The shift towards social science and humanities degrees is part of a deep change in global markets. In 2018, the Royal Bank of Canada released a report called *The Coming Skills Revolution: Humans Wanted*.⁷⁶ It warned that the most in-demand skills for a future workforce would be data interpretation, reading comprehension, communication, teamwork, and empathy. The workforce would have to be increasingly flexible. Jobs dependent on technical or basic skills would face potentially intense disruptions from automation. Note that this was four years before the release of ChatGPT; now, generative A.I. programs can even write code for programmers.

The 2018 RBC report is echoed by the bank's 2025 report, *A Smarter Path: The Case of Post-Secondary Reform*, part of their ongoing *Growth Project*.^{77,78} The report seeks to understand why a highly educated country such as Canada could, nonetheless, have stagnant productivity growth,

⁷¹ <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20190401-why-worthless-humanities-degrees-may-set-you-up-for-life>

⁷² <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/why-a-liberal-arts-degree-is-often-a-ticket-to-career-success/#:~:text=%E2%80%9Cyou%20want%20to%20succeed,skills%20highly%20valued%20by%20employer%20S.>

⁷³ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2023-06-21-new-research-shows-how-studying-humanities-can-benefit-young-people-s-future-careers>

⁷⁴ <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/why-a-liberal-arts-degree-is-often-a-ticket-to-career-success>

⁷⁵ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/09/15/businesses-know-the-value-of-social-sciences-higher-education-policy-needs-to-catch-up/>

⁷⁶ https://www.rbc.com/dms/enterprise/futurelaunch/_assets-custom/pdf/RBC-Future-Skills-Report-FINAL-Singles.pdf?_gl=1*1udrmr4*_gcl_au*MTk2NDM4NTU0Mi4xNzM0Mzk0OTUy*_ga*MTE4MjI2MjkwMi4xNzM0Mzk0OTUy*_ga_89NPCTDXQR*MTczNDU3MDcxMS4zLjEuMTczNDU3MzU0OC42MC4wLjA.

⁷⁷ <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/a-smarter-path-the-case-for-postsecondary-education-reform/#:~:text=In%20this%20report%2C%20we%20identify,to%20sharpening%20Canada's%20competitive%20edge.>

⁷⁸ <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/the-growth-project/>

despite the well-recognized importance of education in improving productivity. Among the issues mentioned is the fact that employees increasingly need interpersonal and communications skills; according to surveys of the business community, the post-secondary sector does not, as yet, sufficiently focus on cultivating these skills.^{79,80} While soft skills are not the *only* important skill for new graduates to learn—an ability to work with artificial intelligence was also mentioned as an increasingly high-demand skill—it is nonetheless a gap that the RBC report notes must be filled in order to maximize Canada’s productivity.

RBC’s reports echoes a trend that labour economists and other observers are well aware of: “soft” or “higher order” skills are increasingly in demand, even in tech-heavy industries.^{81,,82,83,84,85,86,87,88,89,90} Key factors behind this shift include the fact that businesses have become less hierarchical and more team based, which requires greater communication, relationship building, empathetic, and task management skill in order to solve coordination problems.^{91,92,93,94,95} Markets are more globally integrated, too, meaning that having the ability to understand and work with other cultures is essential for creating resilient supply chains, signing and enforcing contracts, and developing relationships with consumers, something that is only just

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/benchmarking-higher-education-system-performance_be5514d7-en.html

⁸¹ Hansen, S., Ramdas, T., Sadun, R. and Fuller, J. 2021. “The Demand for Executive Skills,” *NBER Working Paper*: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28959/w28959.pdf

⁸² Deming, J.D. 2022. “Four Facts about Human Capital,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36(3): 75-102.

⁸³ Weidmann, B. and Deming, J.D. 2021. “Team Players: How Social Skills Improve Team Performance,” *Econometrica* 89(6): 2637-2657.

⁸⁴ Lyu, W. and Liu, J. 2021. “Soft Skills, Hard Skills: What Matters Most? Evidence from Job Postings,” *Applied Energy* 300(15): 117307.

⁸⁵ Al Asefer, M. and Zainal Abidin, N.S. 2021. “Soft Skills and Graduates’ Employability in the 21st Century From Employers Perspectives: A Review of the Literature,” *International Journal of Infrastructure Research and Management* 9(2): 44-59.

⁸⁶ Sancho-Cantus, D., Cubero-Plazas, L., Navas, M.B., Castellno-Rioja, E., and Ros, M.C. 2023. “Importance of Soft Skills in Health Sciences Students and their Repercussions after the COVID-19 Epidemic: Scoping Review,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20(1): 4901. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20064901>

⁸⁷ Poláková, M., Suleimanová, J.H., Madžík, P., Copuš, L., Molnárová, L., and Polednová, J. 2023. “Soft Skills and their Importance in the Labour Market under the Conditions of Industry 5.0,” *Heliyon* 9(1): e18670. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e18670>

⁸⁸ Mohammad, F.S. and Ozdamli, F. 2024. “A Systemic Literature Review of Soft Skills in Information Technology Education,” *Behavioural Sciences* 14(10): 894. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14100894>

⁸⁹ Romanenko, Y.N., Stepanova, M., and Maksimenko, N. 2024. “Soft Skills: Students and Employers Crave,” *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* 11(1): 931. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03250-8>

⁹⁰ Weidmann, B., Vecchi, J., Said, F., Deming, D.J., and Bhalotra, S.R. 2024. “How Do You Find a Good Manager?” *NBER Working Paper*: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w32699/w32699.pdf

⁹¹ <https://hbr.org/2023/09/is-organizational-hierarchy-getting-in-the-way-of-innovation>

⁹² Weidmann, B., Vecchi, J., Said, F., Deming, D.J., and Bhalotra, S.R. 2024. “How Do You Find a Good Manager?” *NBER Working Paper*: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w32699/w32699.pdf

⁹³ <https://your.yale.edu/we-know-teamwork-important-how-important>

⁹⁴ <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/rethinking-hierarchy/>

⁹⁵ Basu, S., Ma, X., and Shen, M. 2024. “The Value of Teamwork for Firms’ Human Capital,” *Columbia Business School Working Paper*: <https://business.columbia.edu/sites/default/files-efs/imce-uploads/ADP/2023-2024/Basu%20Ma%20Shen%2020230904.pdf>

now being recognized in parts of management studies.⁹⁶ And economists are starting to recognize that management skills, which rely heavily on soft skills, matter for both microeconomic indicators like firm performance and macroeconomic indicators like country-level productivity.^{97,98,99,100} According to the World Management Survey, better management involves extensive cooperation and communication between managers, workers, and partners outside the firm (like suppliers).¹⁰¹ Finally, compensation for generalists—i.e., people whose skillset is applicable for a wide variety of jobs in a wide variety of firms—is also increasing relative to specialists, both because specialists have less career mobility and because general skills have a higher return on investment.¹⁰² What this means is that firms are willing to compensate employees with general skills higher than those with highly specific skills, which in most economic models, is taken to indicate that general skills are more important for firm profitability than specialist skills.

The core academic mission of the social sciences and humanities are forwarding our understanding about how people interact with one another, with systems (both human-made or not), and with different cultures and norms. These are subjects that demand persuasive argumentation and textual analysis rather than rote memorization. They are also significantly more general degrees, which is why a study from 2020 found that social science and humanities graduates were more likely to be managers and entrepreneurs.¹⁰³ And as already argued earlier in this policy statement, if the social sciences or humanities were awash in ideological bias or lacked academic rigour to a fatal extent, then businesses would not waste their time hiring these graduates. Certainly, we would not see demand so dramatically increase for graduates from these degree streams.

Indeed, as already mentioned, the RBC report was written before the major advances in generative artificial intelligence we have seen. With A.I. advancing at a seemingly rapid pace, a social science or humanities degree may be all the more important. Many commentators have noted the importance of these degrees in helping to develop guidelines around the ethical use of A.I.,¹⁰⁴ but these degrees are important for the *development and social integration* of A.I. as well. As this

⁹⁶ Cantoni, F., Ricciardi, A., Bisogni, P.G., and Zsifkovits, H. 2024. “The Unravelling Role of Soft Skills in the Logistics and Supply Chain Management Fields,” *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge* 9(4): 100615.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2024.100615>

⁹⁷ Bloom, N. and Van Reenan, J. 2010. “Why Do Management Practices Differ across Firms and Countries?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24(1): 203-24.

⁹⁸ Bloom, N., Eifert, B., Mahajan, A., McKenzie, D., and Roberts, J. 2013. “Does Management Matter? Evidence from India,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128(1): 1-51.

⁹⁹ Bloom, N., Sadun, R., and Van Reenan, J. 2016. “Management as a Technology?” IZA DP No. 9987:

<https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/9987/management-as-a-technology>

¹⁰⁰ Bender, S., Bloom, N., Card, D., Van Reenan, J., and Wolter, S. 2018. “Management Practices, Workforce Selection, and Productivity,” *Journal of Labor Economics* 36(1): 371-409.

¹⁰¹ <https://worldmanagementsurvey.org/data/dwms-public-sector/wms-methodology/>

¹⁰² Hervé, J. 2023. “Specialists or Generalists? Cross-Industry Mobility and Wages,” *Labour Economics* 84(1): 102391. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2023.102391>

¹⁰³ Leighton, M. and Speer, J.D. 2020. “Labor Market Returns to College Major Specificity,” *European Economic Review* 128(1): 103489. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euroecorev.2020.103489>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2024/05/why-social-science-because-it-can-help-contribute-to-ai-that-benefits-society/>

article from the Australian Academy of the Humanities outlines,¹⁰⁵ social science and humanities scholars' impact A.I. development in numerous ways:

1. **Philosophers** provide both the framework and the questions for defining what a “mind” or “intelligent behaviour” is, and what structures are likely to produce them;
2. **Historians and literature professors** are essential in utilizing and improving the way A.I. systems, particularly Large Language Models (LLMs) access, analyze, and sort through human writing;
3. **Social scientists** broadly have the training necessary to identify, and provide strategies to counter, biased or otherwise bottlenecked data, allowing A.I. systems to learn better and in a more broadly beneficial way;
4. **Linguists** more specifically are examining the impact of LLMs on cultures, particularly if LLMs are predominantly trained on one language.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of the importance of the social sciences or humanities to something like A.I. is in the career of Herbert Simon. Simon was one of the founders and most important figures in the field of artificial intelligence, but he was educated first and foremost as a political scientist.¹⁰⁶ His contributions to the field of A.I. were not because he was pursuing side projects, but were instead informed by his work as a social scientist, and particularly how the study of administrative behaviour sheds light on the mind as an information processor.^{107,108,109,110}

Therefore, put simply, when businesses talk about how important the social sciences and humanities are, they are talking about how these degrees create generalists with well-rounded soft skills. These skills are all the more important in an era of A.I. Because of this, any policy proposal which seeks to reinvigorate Canada's productivity should not neglect the social sciences or humanities when developing their human capital plans.

There is a Lack of Incentive to Invest in These Skills from the Private Sector

While the social sciences and humanities provide important resources to businesses, one question that could be asked is: should on-the-job training not supply businesses with the skills necessary to full the demand for soft skills? If that were the case, then the economic argument for the importance of social science and humanities degrees may decrease. The recent demand for these graduates may simply be part of Canada's broader investment problem, or may even represent a “crowding out” effect of government subsidies towards post-secondary education.

But this argument collapses the moment we recognize the disincentives that firms face in training their workforce. Indeed, a much stronger case can be made that social science and humanities

¹⁰⁵ <https://humanities.org.au/news/why-humanities-is-essential-in-an-ai-driven-world/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1978/simon/biographical/>

¹⁰⁷ https://amturing.acm.org/award_winners/simon_1031467.cfm

¹⁰⁸ Simon, H.A. 1947. *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization*. New York: Macmillan Inc.

¹⁰⁹ Simon, H.A. 1969. *The Science of the Artificial*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

¹¹⁰ Newell, A. and Simon, H.A. 1972. *Human Problem Solving*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

courses, provided by publicly funded post-secondary institutions, are the *only* way we can ensure that Canada's supply of soft skills meets demand.

Firms will invest in something—skills, physical capital, whatever—if they can be sure they exclusively reap the benefits. Training employees to use a proprietary machine poses no incentives problem, because that's a very specific skill—what is called “firm-specific human capital.” Most employees will not be able to defect to a rival firm and profitably use those skills, so firms can capture all the benefits from this investment. But general skills are, by definition, applicable in a wide variety of situations—and, most importantly, firms. If a firm invests time and resources into improving their employee's general skillset—aka, “general human capital”—then there is nothing stopping those employees from moving to another firm (and possibly a rival one, at that) for better pay, better promotion opportunities, or any number of utility-enhancing offers we would expect in a competitive labour market. A firm could try to keep employees rooted by requiring Non-Compete Clauses, but that would come at a great cost: labour market mobility would be severely hampered. Only so many firms can get away with that practice before the labour market collapses.

Consequently, the gap between firm's demands for soft skills and their incentives to invest in employee training are a market failure. Post-secondary institutions are thus essential institutions for developing and supplying soft skills to the private sector, which can be done by employing academics who rigorously research human systems and behaviour and teach upcoming researchers the skills to understand these processes. The private sector *may* contribute some funding to these institutions, but because they again will be tempted to free ride on other firms donations or grants, it is unlikely that private funding will ever allow post-secondary institutions to meet the business demand for soft skills. And while not-for-profit foundations may *also* contribute funding, in the absence of the emergence of an anarchist society, no organization will be able to provide consistent funding in the same way as the government. Thus, government funding for social science and humanities degrees is essential in ensuring that businesses have a sufficient stock of soft skills to choose from.

Funding and Political Challenges

As we have stated in UCGSA.01,¹¹¹ the Albertan post-secondary system faces severe funding challenges. This is true for most post-secondary institutions throughout Canada. Canada spends a lot of money on education, but a shrinking amount of that money comes from the government. As Alex Usher has pointed out, public funding to post-secondary as a percentage of GDP has effectively halved since the 1970s.¹¹² Some jurisdictions—such as Ontario and Alberta—have taken a chainsaw to operating funding. A snapshot of Alberta's funding data is included in **Figure 1** below: all institutions have seen massive funding cuts, but research-intensive universities have suffered the steepest drop-off.

Other funding policies are creating a different set of problems. Some jurisdictions—again, like Alberta—have prioritized targeted enrollment expansion in the skilled trades and medicine in order

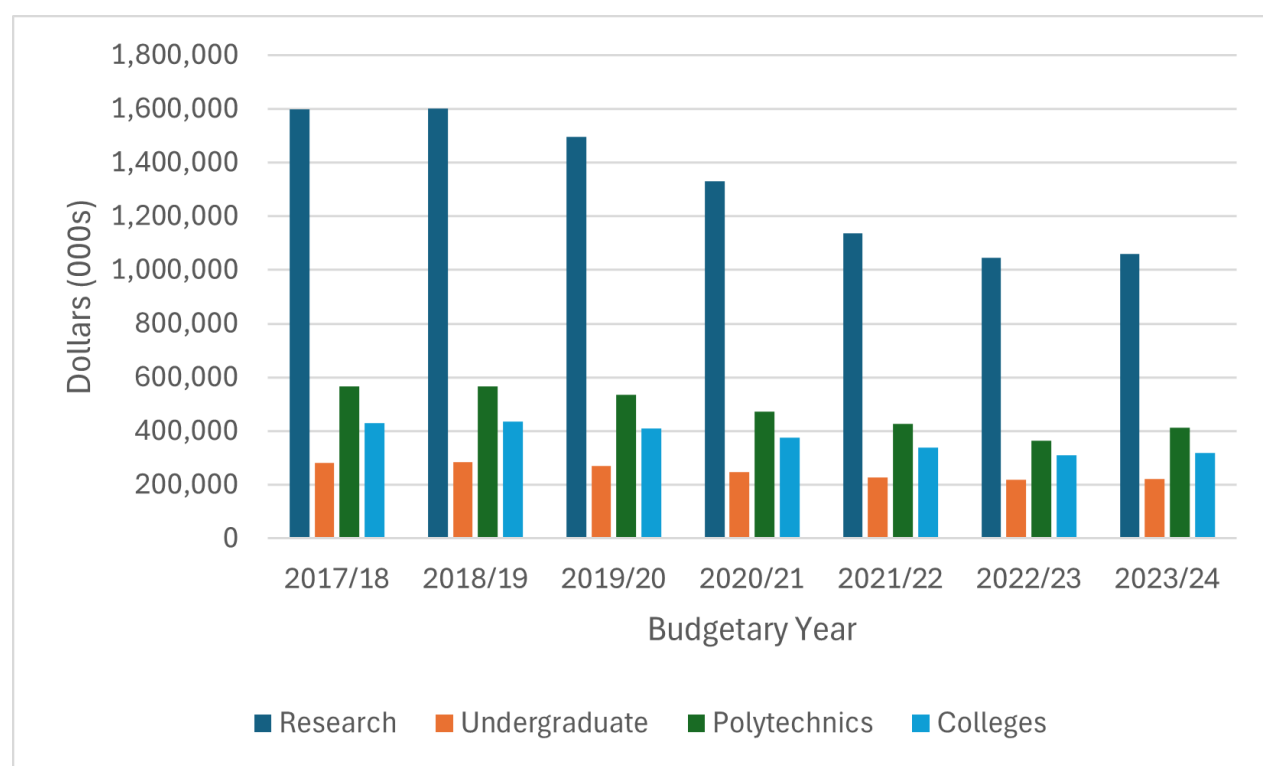
¹¹¹ <https://gsa.ucalgary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UCGSA.01-Provincial-Funding-Policy-Final-Draft-2024-25-Update-Vol-2.27.pdf>

¹¹² <https://higherstrategy.com/no-one-is-coming-to-save-us/>

to meet current labour market needs.¹¹³ This means that what limited funding is available is locked into what the government thinks the labour market needs now. That does not leave a lot of flexibility to address the demand for soft skills, even if funding suddenly increased.

The end result is that the faculties and departments that administer social science or humanities degrees have come under severe budgetary strain. And because private businesses lack an incentive to invest in these degree streams, despite their importance, there are few alternative funding options available. If the financial squeeze faced by these faculties/departments results in fewer faculty hires, fewer successful graduate students, fewer *recruited* graduate students, or subpar instruction at both the graduate and undergraduate level, then the end result will be a lower level of soft skills than the Albertan and Canadian economies need.

Fig. 1. Real Operating Funding to Albertan Research-Intensive Universities (Nov 2024 CPI)¹¹⁴



But the political challenges the social sciences and humanities face are just as great as the funding challenges, and this returns us to the earlier conversation around EDI. The earlier section of this policy statement concentrated on the federal level, but political opposition to these degrees has also emerged at the provincial level. While we are largely happy with the exceptions currently in place in the *Provincial Priorities Act*, which exempt student research funding from review by the

¹¹³ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/bf7f9a42-a807-49b3-8ba3-451ae3bc2d2f/resource/e29f7d8b-73c4-4dd4-af7d-833ae3e01bef/download/ae-mandate-letter-advanced-education-2023.pdf>

¹¹⁴ See Appendix for raw numbers.

provincial government,¹¹⁵ this does not neglect the fact that accusations of ideological bias were what prompted the *Act* to include universities in the first place.¹¹⁶

Attacks on these degree streams because of their supposed association with EDI—and the attacks on EDI more broadly—place an extreme amount of social pressure on institutions to cut back on research that may inform, or overlaps with, questions around equity and diversity, or at least muzzle research that is at variance with the political opinions of the government. It is also likely that such public (and at times, vitriolic) discourse is discouraging students from applying to these degrees; certainly, the conversation around these degrees being “useless” would do so. And as the previous section should have made clear, these attacks come at the cost of forfeiting the government’s essential role in ensuring that the demand for soft skills is met.

Conclusion

Contrary to the narrative that a social science or humanities degree is “useless” (in addition to being “woke”), changing labour market dynamics are only increasing the demand for the types of soft skills that are provided by social science or humanities degrees. Because human capital—and, in particular, soft skills—are a type of economic good that is undersupplied by the private sector, though, government support is needed to ensure that sufficient soft skills are available for an innovative, productive economy. A lack of funding sufficient enough to support the social science and humanities programs at Albertan universities therefore risks leaving the province, and Canada more broadly, at a skills disadvantage, especially with the emergence of increasingly more sophisticated A.I. models. Political attacks on the usefulness, or even political neutrality, of these degrees only compounds the risks to Alberta’s economic prosperity.

Part IV

Role of the (Federal and Provincial) Governments

Both the federal and provincial governments fund and regulate post-secondary institutions, albeit with the federal government exercising much more indirect authority. Research funding agreements from the Tri-Council granting agencies represent a significant portion of post-secondary institution’s operating budgets, as **Figure 2** shows for the University of Calgary; but as the discussion around the impact of criteria on science in Canada indicates, the stipulations placed on these funding deals could, theoretically, alter the governance of universities as well. Meanwhile, education is exclusive provincial jurisdiction under the Canadian Constitution,¹¹⁷ meaning that Ministries of Advanced Education have wide latitude in determining the funding and governance of universities within their province.

Consequently, if the objective of supporting institutions of higher learning is to provide support economic growth and development, then both levels of government should exercise their power over post-secondary institutions with extreme caution. In the first sense, this means giving greater weight to the internal discussions of independent granting agencies when investigating the impacts

¹¹⁵ <https://www.canlii.org/en/ab/laws/regu/alta-reg-21-2025/latest/alta-reg-21-2025.html>

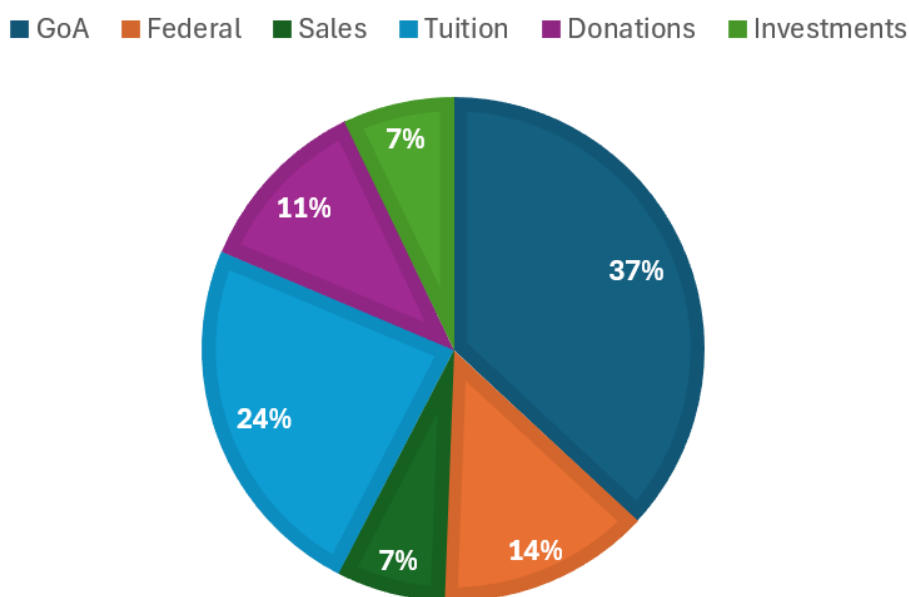
¹¹⁶ <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2024/alberta-research-control/>

¹¹⁷ *The Constitution Act, 1867*, 30 & 31 Vict, c 3, Division IV, Section 93

of funding criteria. In the current context, this means avoiding the use of committees to overturn, outlaw, or otherwise sideline EDIA commitments within those granting agencies—which, as we have endeavoured to show, does not come at the expense of research quality or create an overwhelming “left-wing bias” in academia. Should EDIA policies need to be modified, it is preferable to leave that conversation up to academics, especially since political uncertainty would put hundreds of millions of dollars of research grants—at the university-industry partnerships that these grants help forge—at risk. In the second sense, this means valuing—as government policy—the contributions of *all* disciplines to economic growth and security, whether they are from the social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, medical fields, or any that do not fit neatly into these boxes. The business community greatly values the “useless” degrees in the social sciences and humanities; the government must not, then, get in the way of the market when it is instructing us on how to prosper.

Furthermore, government funding decisions can determine which faculties or departments get public dollars to support their students and faculty members. At the federal level, if funding for SSHRC research grants is curtailed—especially because of highly politicized conversations around funding criteria—then the already lean budgets of social science and humanities departments will further decrease, and we should expect to see significantly fewer undergraduate and graduate students choose or successfully complete these programs. Canada’s ability to generate sufficient soft skills to thrive in a dynamic labour market will be severely hampered, negatively impacting the prosperity of all Canadians. At the provincial level, targeted enrollment programs that concentrate only on STEM fields risk undermining the operating budgets of social science and humanities departments, leading to the same outcomes already mentioned.

Fig.2. Percentage of UCalgary Operating Budget By Revenue Source (2023/24)¹¹⁸



¹¹⁸ University of Calgary, “Consolidated Financial Statements for the Year Ended March 31, 2024” § (2024), pg. 6.

Recommendations

Therefore, we urge both the provincial and federal governments to take the following actions to address the issues presented above.

Be It Resolved That

1. UCalgary GSA calls upon the Government of Alberta to focus on securing and enhancing Alberta's innovation and research ecosystem rather than attempting to "win" the culture war;
2. UCalgary GSA calls upon the Government of Canada to focus on securing and enhancing Canada's innovation and research ecosystem rather than attempting to "win" the culture war;
3. UCalgary GSA calls upon the Government of Alberta to:
 - a. Move away from targeted enrollment funding strategies which restrict available funding for social science and humanities faculties and departments;
 - b. Take a more long-term view of labour market demands that recognize the need for "soft skills" and the degrees that provide these skills.

Appendix

Figure 1

Operating funding from Alberta is taken from the [Ministry of Advanced Education's Annual Reports](#) (2017/18 to 2023/24), pages 54, 13, 75, 76, 71, and 119, respectively. These are unaudited totals for all years except 2020/21: that year's annual report lacks the operating grant breakdown of the other reports, and thus it uses an adjusted number. The reason I have used the Ministry of Advanced Education's numbers, rather than those from each institution's Consolidated Financial Statements, is that the Ministry of Advanced Education includes all funding designated as "operating funding." It thus provides a more holistic account of what the government designates as "operating funding."

For research universities, I added the total amount of operating funding for the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, Athabasca University, and the University of Lethbridge together, then plugged it into the Bank of Canada's [Inflation Calculator](#).

For primarily undergraduate universities, I added the total amount of operating funding for MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, and the Alberta University of the Arts (formerly Alberta College of Arts and Design). For the 2017/18 budgetary year, the Alberta University of the Arts was classified as a "Specialized Arts and Culture Institution." In order to paint a comparable picture of operating funding for these schools, I included that total in the 2017/18 calculations.

For polytechnics, I added the total amount of operating funding for Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Northwestern Polytechnic (formerly Grande Prairie Regional College) and Red Deer Polytechnic (formerly Red Deer College). Northwestern and Red Deer were classified as colleges until 2021; again, in order to offer a better funding comparison for this group, I included those totals in the polytechnic calculation.

Finally, for colleges, I added the total amount of operating funding for Bow Valley College, Keyano College, Lakeland College, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, NorQuest College, Northern Lakes College, Olds College, and Portage College.

Raw data for each category, plus the annual inflation rate for each period, is listed below. I have also listed the percentage decrease in funding for each category of institution (from the funding peak) to back up the claim that research-intensive institutions have seen the steepest cuts.

Nominal and Inflation Adjusted Funding for Research-Intensive Universities

Year	Nominal Funding (000s)	Real Funding (Nov 2024 CPI, 000s)	% Change in Real Funding
2017/18	1,318,293	1,597,751	--
2018/19	1,349,848	1,600,554	+0.18
2019/20	1,273,141	1,495,964	-6.5
2020/21	1,185,141	1,329,702	-11.1
2021/22	1,081,711	1,136,499	-14.5
2022/23	1,026,296	1,045,684	-8.0
2023/24	1,059,101	1,059,101	+1.3
Cumulative Change	-290,747	-541,453	-33.8

Nominal and Inflation Adjusted Funding for Primarily Undergraduate Universities

Year	Nominal Funding (000s)	Real Funding (Nov 2024 CPI, 000s)	% Change in Real Funding
2017/18	232,288	281,530	--
2018/19	240,222	284,955	+1.2
2019/20	230,044	270,306	-5.1
2020/21	221,326	248,339	-8.1
2021/22	216,999	227,990	-8.2
2022/23	214,387	218,437	-4.2
2023/24	222,776	222,776	+2.0
Cumulative Change	-17,446	-62,179	-21.8

Nominal and Inflation Adjusted Funding for Polytechnics

Year	Nominal Funding (000s)	Real Funding (Nov 2024 CPI, 000s)	% Change in Real Funding
2017/18	467,149	566,178	--
2018/19	476,725	565,499	-0.1
2019/20	456,008	535,818	-5.2
2020/21	421,437	472,875	-13.3
2021/22	407,437	428,073	-9.5
2022/23	358,553	365,327	-14.7
2023/24	411,426	411,426	+12.6
Cumulative Change	-65,299	-154,752	-27.3

Nominal and Inflation Adjusted Funding for Colleges

Year	Nominal Funding (000s)	Real Funding (Nov 2024 CPI, 000s)	% Change of Real Funding
2017/18	334,659	429,841	--
2018/19	367,501	435,936	+1.4
2019/20	348,876	409,936	-6.0
2020/21	335,211	376,124	-8.2
2021/22	322,736	339,082	-9.8
2022/23	303,643	309,379	-8.8
2023/24	317,187	317,187	+2.5
Cumulative Change	-50,314	-118,749	-27.2

Annual Inflation Rate

Year	Annual Inflation Rate (%)
2017/18	3.26
2018/19	3.47
2019/20	4.11
2020/21	3.91
2021/22	2.50
2022/23	1.89
2023/24	N/A