

Western Clusters of Research Excellence Program March 2013

1.0 Context:

Western's identity as a research-intensive university reflects a history of scholarly and scientific achievement that has served as the underpinning of the institution's most important planning documents for the past two decades. The themes held in common within these documents promote a culture that pursues excellence in research and teaching as an essential means to developing leaders whose skills, knowledge, innovation and invention contribute tangible benefits for Canadian society and the broader global community. Indeed, these planning documents make reference to Western being the destination of choice for leading scientists, scholars, students and trainees who aspire to conduct research with local, national and global impact. Reaching this goal will require significant investments in areas of strategic importance to the University - areas that demonstrate research excellence with high potential to become globally renowned.

The most significant global issues and challenges that we face today are complex and occur at the intersection of disciplines. In today's research environment the greatest advances are made through the integration and convergence of disciplines. Therefore the focus of the development of strategic research clusters at Western will be on capacity building and shaping Western's collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

2.0 Program:

2.1 The **Western Clusters of Research Excellence** program will guide the future development and establishment of internationally prominent, competitive research programs and training facilities.

To this end we will establish and specifically support up to four institutionally driven Clusters of Research Excellence in key thematic areas of strategic importance. Clusters will be expected to enhance collaboration and interdisciplinary research and capacity, significantly raise our international research profile and competitiveness, and foster excellence and innovation.

Western Clusters of Research Excellence are expected to provide a sustainable platform for:

- i) Interdisciplinary cross-faculty/institutional collaborative research programs
- ii) Pooling skills, expertise and infrastructure
- iii) Promoting cutting-edge, internationally competitive research in major areas of significant societal importance
- iv) Providing exceptional training environments for post docs, graduate and undergraduate students
- v) Attracting and retaining outstanding faculty, staff and students.

The key to long-term success for any cluster is to continue to support excellence in basic, fundamental and curiosity-driven research within disciplines, as this is the basis for effective and sustainable interdisciplinarity. Building focused capacity in strategic clusters of excellence will serve to enhance traditional curiosity driven research and innovation within core disciplines and bring these to bear on the interdisciplinary context of the clusters.

Following the development of the 2013 University Strategic Plan, Western will identify up to 4 *overarching thematic areas* that capture the breadth of research and scholarship at Western and that recognize established or emerging areas of strength.

Western will establish up to 4 Clusters of Research Excellence in defined areas of strength that are aligned with one or more of these overarching themes. Clusters will concentrate new resources and talent to foster cutting-edge research of national and global impact in areas of major significance.

For each Western Cluster of Research Excellence, Western will provide:

- a) \$5 million in funding over a 5 - year period (notionally \$1mil/year).

This funding is available for:

- i) Recruitment of tenure-track Faculty members (any rank, but preferably mid to senior) using the selection procedures set out for CRC appointments
 - ii) Graduate student and post-doctoral support and training programs
 - iii) Administrative, technical and operational support
 - iv) Infrastructure and facility support/development
 - v) Outreach and scholarly activities
- b) As justified, Tier I and Tier II CRCs will be aligned with Clusters as they become available.
 - c) Support for strategically aligned endowed chairs (minimum donor contribution of \$2M) in the amount of \$1M as determined by the Provost on the advice of the VPR.

2.2 The Western Research Chair Program (WRC) is specific to the Western Clusters of Research Excellence program.

Western will establish *up to* 10 Western Research Chairs (WRC) modeled after Tier 1 CRCs. (200K/year for 5 years, renewable at the discretion of the Provost on the recommendation of the VPR). These Chairs are to be held by new appointments only and will be directed towards attracting mid to senior level investigators.

Each Chair holder will be provided with *up to* \$500K (discipline dependent) in start-up funds, leveraged with the CFI LOF as allowed. Each Cluster may propose up to 3 WRCs.

All Research Cluster appointments (WRC and tenure track appointments) will be made using the Western CRC selection procedures. (Search committee process with recommendation by VPR to Provost for appointment).

2.3 Assessment of Outcomes will be achieved through **Annual Reports** to be submitted to the VPR and Provost outlining activities. Clusters will develop a research program which includes key performance indicators that incorporate a growth profile and annual performance targets. Performance evaluations will be underpinned by individual and collective measures of excellence sustained at a national and international level.

Consideration will be given to discipline specific measures of research excellence in addition and to sectoral measures of research quality and impact. These include but are not limited to funding success and research income (from all sources), peer-reviewed publications and other scholarly contributions, citations, awards, honors, keynote addresses, invited addresses, partnerships, and HQP statistics. Other performance measures will include, where appropriate, increased technology/knowledge transfer and commercialization and success in major national and international funding competitions (CFI, NCE, etc.)

There will also be a requirement for demonstrated success in discipline convergence and increased national and international profile. Ongoing funding will be contingent on demonstrated progress toward goals and objectives identified at the time of establishment of the cluster and continuing alignment with the Universities strategic priorities.

3.0 Process

Proposals for Western Clusters of Research Excellence will be invited following consultations with the Deans and Research Western. Successful clusters of research excellence will require, among other things;

- a) The direct partnership and lead of at least 2 Faculties
- b) Provision of research support as appropriate for new recruits - within the current University infrastructure
- c) Clear plans from the partner Faculties for sustainability beyond the 5 year initial period (for instance, the commitment for long term support for new Faculty, staff etc.).
- d) Realistic plans for leveragability and amplification of the above investments through various co-funding arrangements and initiatives (for instance, direct and in-kind faculty investments (such as attribution of Faculty share of overheads to the advancement of the cluster, staff re-deployment), private and public-sector partnerships and contracts, community engagement, fund-raising, affiliated institutional partnerships, commercialization opportunities etc.

3.1 First Step - Given the demonstrated international stature of Cognitive Neuroscience at Western we will initiate the development of the first Western Cluster of Research Excellence in this area in early 2013. Processes for the identification and implementation of subsequent Clusters will be refined through the experience derived in the development of the Cognitive Neuroscience cluster and after the development of Western's Strategic Plan.