Assessing impacts in the humanities and social sciences

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some examples of impact systems
Overview

• Objectives of the Federation’s Impacts Project
• Canadian context for impact assessment
• Key findings and recommendations of Federation report
The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

- Represents more than 90,000 scholars in the humanities and social sciences
- Organizer of the Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Advocacy group focusing on research and education
- Website: ideas-idees.ca
The Federation’s Impacts Project

- Research and consultation
- Working paper in 2014
- *Approaches* report in 2017
Objectives

- Support a productive and positive dialogue
- Promote an understanding of the possibilities and limitations
- Ensure key factors relevant to HSS are taken into account
- Help the HSS community better articulate its impacts

To succeed, the research community will need a shared understanding of the key factors that underlie the assessment of scholarship.
Impact assessment in Canada

• Government interest in performance measures
• Limited role of impact indicators in research funding
  • Impact statements, knowledge-mobilization plans
  • Funding decision still driven by peer review
• Universities using impact assessment in planning and communication
Benefits and risks

Benefits
• Recognition of value of HSS
• Increased attention and support
• Research co-development
• Enhanced impacts

Risks
• Perverse incentives
• Skewed research priorities
• Valuing what is measurable

One of the primary benefits of impact assessment, therefore, is to allow the HSS community to share exciting success stories that have gone untold for too long.
Understanding the impacts of HSS

• HSS has substantial and diverse impacts across society

• A framework to understand academic impacts and impacts on society
Scope of HSS impact: Five baskets

**Academic impacts**

**SCHOLARSHIP**
that can be measured using indicators such as:
- Bibliometric indicators
- Downloads from Open Access repositories
- Citations in grant applications
- Acknowledgements
- Prizes and awards
- Reputation as measured by survey
- Post-publication peer review (book reviews, dedicated symposia)
- Juried exhibitions and performances

**CAPACITY**
through teaching and mentoring at the graduate and undergraduate levels that can be measured using indicators such as:
- Number and quality of experiential learning/research opportunities for students
- Surveys of students and alumni
- Employer surveys
- Integration of research as a learning outcome in courses
Scope of HSS impact: Five baskets

**Impacts on society**

**PRACTICE AND POLICY**
that can be measured using indicators such as:
- Invitations to participate as an expert witness, an advisor, on an expert panel or committee
- Citations in government documents
- Consulting for governments or think tanks
- Commissioned reports

**SOCIETY AND CULTURE**
that can be measured using indicators such as:
- Number and quality of partnerships between researchers and community groups
- Requests for consultancy/advice from community groups
- Media coverage of research (newspapers, TV, online)
- Requests for media appearances
- Engagement of the public at events
- Research-related social media
- Public use of research-based web resources on social and cultural issues

**ECONOMY**
that can be measured using indicators such as:
- Advisory roles and board memberships
- Revenue opportunities and cost savings in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors resulting from research applied in practice
- Income derived from patents, patent licensing, copyright and trademarks
- Consulting contracts
A pluralistic approach

• Scholars face vastly different realities
  • Different forms of impact
  • Different pathways to impact
  • Different opportunities to demonstrate impact

• A pluralistic approach accounts for impact in its many forms
Key findings

• No single impact indicator or set of indicators can fully capture impact
• Bibliometrics are a useful but limited tool
• Not always possible to attribute impacts due to time lags and collaborative efforts
• Users and non-academic partners are vital – “pathways” assessment approaches are needed

An impact pathway describes the causal linkages in the steps between research and impact and enables the collection of evidence of impact at each step.
Approaches

• Define impacts broadly
• Use diverse and flexible sets of indicators, qualitative and quantitative
• Researchers should play a leading role, in collaboration with research partners and users
• Assess collective impacts
• Develop institutional supports

There is substantial support in the literature for using blended methods that combine quantitative measures with qualitative approaches.
Illustrating the approaches

Illustrative case studies

• Impacts in folklore studies
• Policy impacts in a dynamic environment (basic income)
• Collective impacts in immigrant skill development
• Community-engaged research in history
Questions

Email the Federation at membership@ideas-idees.ca