

## REMOVAL OF SSHRC's "4A" EVALUATIVE CATEGORY

As members may know, SSRHC has now banished the "4A" evaluative category for Insight and Insight Development grants. This category (the labeling of which followed a system internal to SSRHC, and was not intended to be very meaningful to researchers themselves) was originally inserted into the grant evaluation process as a way of flagging the difference in success rates between loosely analogous SSRHC and NSERC competitions in particular. This difference was an artifact of greatly disparate funding between the two agencies. "4A" was basically a sly way for committees to say, "this would have been funded if we could afford to fund the same proportion of grants that NSERC does."

There were various things to dislike about the 4A category, including that it was not very clearly employed with consistency across committees. But it played some important roles both for researchers and for institutions. It has been replaced with data provided by SSHRC to institutions that indicates the placement of each application in its committee's ranking, with this data broken down by sextiles. Individual researchers will still be given their application's precise overall ordinal ranking.

In one sense the new approach means more fine-grained data, since previously institutions just got data divided into three categories: funded (1), recommended but unfunded (4A) and not recommended (4). Now they will get data divided into six categories. In a different sense it might mean *less* information for institutions, however, since the sextile distribution is *just* an arithmetic partitioning of the ranked proposals. The previous tripartite partition was (at least in theory) organized not around an arithmetic principle, but around a norm of scholarly merit: 4A meant *recommended for funding*, and this recommendation came courtesy of each expert external assessment panel at SSHRC. In a strong-cohort year there might be more 4As from a particular panel, and in a weak year, fewer.

This feature of the 4A category enabled many universities (though certainly not all) to make evidence-based decisions about allocating university funds to support reapplications for promising proposals that missed out on the funded band. 4A-ranked proposals often received internal funds while 4-ranked proposals did not; in this way, institutions leveraged the epistemological labour performed by the evaluation committees. 4A status was also a modest but non-trivial accomplishment that researchers could record on their CVs to indicate the overall-positive reception their research proposal had received from expert reviewers.

It's fair to observe that, in practice, 4A status often did represent a merely arithmetical division, since some committees worked from prior assumptions about what proportions of applications should fall into each category. But 4A category plausibly expressed a more value-laden judgement than the sextile distinction will express on their own. Which means that SSHRC researchers and administrators are currently reflecting on how these sextile orderings will be interpreted and treated institutionally. This process may take some time, and some institutional advocacy from SSHRC-domain researchers.

Under the new system, the question of whether and how to provide funds in support of grant reapplication for proposals unfunded by SSHRC will be a decision internal to the university, perhaps based on rough longitudinal guesses as to how bands in the ordinal ranking correlate with promising proposals. Institutions that have been choosing to provide such support under the 4A category are, I expect, extremely unlikely to revoke all support under the new scheme. So I doubt that dramatic changes are in the offing. But philosophers in Canada will be well-served by being aware of these changes, and by having Department Chairs carefully prepared to explain both to faculty members and to senior administration how these changes affect the kinds of information that are available to characterize research grants at levels ranging from the whole discipline to individual scholars.

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