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# After public backlash, Wall Scholars program to be left unchanged for next year

Written by [Zak Vescera](#)

Nov. 23, 2018 · 2 min read



Trustees are pumping the brakes on controversial changes to one of UBC's most prestigious academic programs. *Elizabeth Wang*

[https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/wall-scholars-program-to-be-left-unchanged/?fb\\_action\\_ids=10156902270603221&fb\\_action\\_types=og.likes&fbclid=IwAR2RNc4IAR-YStzhzs4ZOm5Qj9hEGV0VpbGV2Ce4\\_5CB\\_DZVhiFBkMbtAYw](https://www.ubyssey.ca/news/wall-scholars-program-to-be-left-unchanged/?fb_action_ids=10156902270603221&fb_action_types=og.likes&fbclid=IwAR2RNc4IAR-YStzhzs4ZOm5Qj9hEGV0VpbGV2Ce4_5CB_DZVhiFBkMbtAYw)

Trustees are pumping the brakes on controversial changes to one of UBC's most prestigious academic programs.

In a statement issued today, President Santa Ono, the chair of the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies (PWIAS), said Wall Scholars will not be required to align their

work with existing university research, contrary to an earlier decision by the PWIAS Board of Trustees.

Ono's announcement comes after 3 days of fallout over former PWIAS Director Dr. Philippe Tortell's resignation over a directive that he says threatens the academic independence of the Institute.

That directive would have required Wall Scholars to "engage directly" with existing Research Excellence Clusters — funded research projects overseen by UBC administrators. Wall Scholars are scholars from all academic backgrounds chosen by the Institute to collaborate on research that exists explicitly outside of other UBC units.

"I am deeply troubled by this new approach, and feel that the mandated re-alignment of PWIAS programs is entirely misguided," wrote Tortell in a letter to PWIAS associates. "It poses an existential threat to the Institute's core mission, academic independence and capacity to catalyze truly innovative and creative research."

The directive stoked anger among current and former Wall Scholars, some of whom suggested they would not take part in the program if it was folded into existing research clusters and that doing so was contrary to the Institute's explicit purpose.



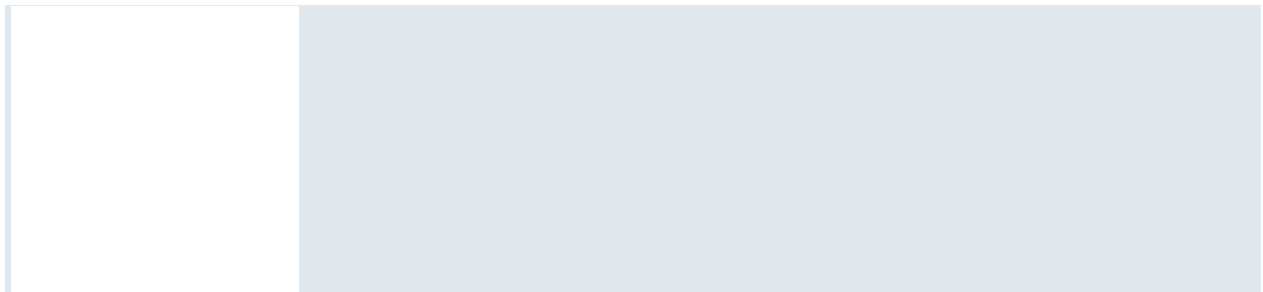
[Kalina Christoff](#)@KalinaChristoff

One of the last remaining chances to engage in free intellectual enquiry at @UBC for a sustained period of time is about to be lost. @WallInstitute director Philippe Tortell resigns in protest of directives from @ubcpres as to how to run the Institute. [https://nghoussoub.com/2018/11/21/why-i-am-resigning-from-the-directorship-of-the-wall-institute/ ...](https://nghoussoub.com/2018/11/21/why-i-am-resigning-from-the-directorship-of-the-wall-institute/)

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“There is of course room for clusters but to limit the work of the Institute this way is as exclusionary as it is destructive,” wrote Peter Wall Distinguished Professors Derek Gregory and Brett Finlay in a [statement issued yesterday](#).

For now, the program will continue as per usual.

“The Wall Scholars 2019 program will also continue with the current criteria, review process and funding, and there is no expectation for Wall Scholars to align with existing Research Excellence Clusters,” wrote Ono.

Other cuts to the Institute’s programs included in the directive, like the elimination of the Wall Solutions Initiative or the International Research Roundtables programs, were not mentioned in the announcement. A representative from PWIAS said that no changes have been set in stone.