

# *Family and Human Dynamics Research Institute*

## *PLANNING REPORT*

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*PREPARED BY*

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*A world-class research-intensive institute dedicated to promoting scientific efforts related to some of the most important and meaningful aspects of our lives – namely children, youth, families, and the dynamics of interactions with their social environments.*

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## *Our Vision*

The Family and Human Dynamics Research Institute (FHDRI) is an interdisciplinary research institute in the new School of Social and Family Dynamics (SSFD; <http://azfamilies.org/SSFD.pdf>) at Arizona State University (ASU). The core goal of the FHDRI is to catalyze and produce pioneering transdisciplinary research by stimulating, supporting, and extending inventive ideas among ASU's faculty. We do this in several ways. First, the FHDRI provides an infrastructure that develops intellectual density by engendering and supporting collaborative research initiatives across the sciences. Second, through fiscal and administrative assistance, the Institute invests in developing investigator-initiated, externally-funded research projects. Third, the FHDRI supports the training of the next generation of promising young scholars, both pre- and post-doctorate. Fourth, through FHDRI-sponsored seminars, workshops, conferences, working papers and other avenues, the FHDRI disseminates research and analyses and promote the work of the social and behavioral sciences at ASU.

The FHDRI supports faculty-initiated research groups and centers. These groups and centers will arise from clusters of faculty working on problems in many different fields but tied together with a focus on research related to some of the most important and meaningful aspects of our lives – namely children, youth, families, and the dynamics of human development and interactions with their social environments. The FHDRI provides a highly flexible institutional environment for cross-collaboration that is designed to induce a dense intellectual lattice of crosscutting substantive, methodological, technical, and policy foci. These features create the potential for insight and collaboration that would otherwise not occur.

Over its first few years, FHDRI will put into place the basic infrastructure of programs, staff, and organizational structures for facilitating and developing its research. The results of these developments will be evident in tangible ways – we expect to see an increase in the number and size of external grants submitted, and in the number and size of external grants awarded. The results also will produce less tangible, but significant results – for instance, a growing intellectual and organizational reputation and the emergence of a vibrant interdisciplinary community, enhanced faculty and graduate student recruitment, and the transformation of the culture of the way we conduct research at the university.

## *Our Core Programs and Elements*

To exploit attractive intellectual and fundraising opportunities, the Institute promotes research development in several high-priority areas that build on existing strengths of core faculty in the new School and tie in with others across ASU. At any given time, there will be several areas of focused

strength – some mature and well-established, others just emerging. Examples of current mature and maturing focused strength areas include:

- *Early Pathways to Competence*: Explorations of the early roots of positive adjustment, social competence, academic performance, and healthy well-being.
- *Family Dynamics*: A focus on understanding the complexities of changing family and social interactions and their causes and consequences.
- *Health Disparities*: A focus on the etiology of mental and physical health, and analysis of health care delivery for minority and other underserved populations (such as women), taking into account cultural/acclimation differences among populations.
- *Human Population Dynamics*: The study of change in human populations and how such change affects individuals, societies, and cultures.
- *Identity and Adjustment of Latino Children and Families*: Research efforts devoted to how Latino children and families form identities and adjust to the demands of life in the broader social context of the United States.

These high-priority areas reflect the current strengths and concentrated engagement of SSFD faculty and students. Taking advantage of these focused strengths, and a strong commitment to provide leadership in addressing pressing social concerns related to the quality of individual, family, and social functioning, the FHDRI focuses on collaborative, transdisciplinary work and facilitates an intellectual synthesis that enables scholars to focus on topics beyond the capabilities of individual scientists and individual disciplines. Our aim is to develop clusters of research projects in these areas and to attain intellectual leadership in these fields. We also anticipate other high priority areas will emerge over the next few years.

To meet our goals and mission, we plan to put into place several mechanisms for creating a cross-disciplinary intellectual community, fostering externally funded research, supporting research training, and disseminating research results. The primary elements of this infrastructure include:

- a Faculty Fellows program to incorporate faculty across the sciences;
- a Junior Faculty Leaders program designed to identify, enlist, and cultivate junior faculty into research/grant leadership roles by providing them with experience that facilitate learning about how to develop successful collaborative research endeavors.
- research clusters and centers that bring faculty together around shared intellectual themes;
- research development investments, e.g., seed grant programs to support innovative work;
- a Graduate Fellows program for dissertation-level students to foster high-quality young scholars;
- seminars and workshops, a working paper series, an email newsletter, and other instruments to disseminate research activities;
- administrative structures to facilitate grant application, grant administration, transdisciplinary linkages, and other organizational operations.

Our immediate goal is to successfully position the Institute to be at the interface of scientific endeavors related to children, youth, families, and their social environments and to put into place the kind of strong

administrative apparatus needed for fostering grant development, administering awards, and creating a lively intellectual community. Our long-term goal is to institutionalize the FHDRI as the research catalyst of the new School and for a new social science at ASU. We expect the future of the social sciences to occur at the intellectual frontier where diverse fields and disciplines meet and interact with one another. Additionally, the future of universities will increasingly require them to be a part of their social context. IFCS will be positioned to be active participants in creating the new American university of the twenty-first century (<http://www.asu.edu/president/newamericanuniversity/>) by producing high-level research that informs practice and policy across a range of problems related to children, youth, families, and their social worlds and that is a national and international force and leader in these areas.