

SUBMITTED BY:

M. ROY WILSON, PRESIDENT

**RECOMMENDATION TO RENEW CHARTER
MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE FOR CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT**

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Governors renew the charter for the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child and Family Development (MPSI) through October 2023, as recommended by the Center and Institute Advisory Committee-II (CIAC-II). The Vice President for Research concurs with this six-year charter renewal recommendation, as does the Policy Committee of the Academic Senate.

BACKGROUND

MPSI works to improve the development, health and well-being of infants, children, youth and their families across the lifespan, through research, education and outreach.

More specifically, MPSI seeks to:

- Conduct research on high-risk urban populations that face a variety of challenges and stressors
- Promote interdisciplinary research in developmental sciences and coordinate outreach programs
- Provide research training for undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral associates in child and family development, and engage the community and translate research into policy and practice

MPSI was formed in 2006 when the Skillman Center was merged with the Merrill Palmer Institute. Dr. Peter Lichtenberg was appointed interim director in 2008 and became the permanent director in 2009. The MPSI management team includes Deputy Director Dr. Steven Ondersma, training director Dr. Hilary Ratner, and Associate Director for Research Dr. Thomas Jankowski. MPSI has strong leadership and is making excellent progress towards its above stated mission.

REVIEW

In accordance with the Board of Governors Wayne State University Statute 2.23.01 *Centers and Institutes: Policy on Creation, Operation, Review, and Discontinuance*, MPSI underwent a formal review by the Center and Institute Advisory Committee-II (CIAC-II) in winter of 2017.

The CIAC-II subcommittee followed the guidelines provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research to assess the evidence and value of the MPSI as a freestanding unit at WSU. The review process involved a) the MPSI self-study documents b) additional materials requested by

the CIAC-II related to grant submissions and publications and c) a site visit at which CIAC-II subcommittee members met with the director, leadership team, senior faculty, junior faculty, community engagement and public awareness team, Early Childcare Center and Woodward Consortium leaders, WSU collaborators, MPSI fellows and training director, internal advisory board and board of visitors.

The subcommittee report recommending that the charter for this Institute be renewed for a period of six years was submitted to and approved by the full CIAC-II committee. The full committee submitted a final report to the Vice President for Research and to the Policy Committee of the Academic Senate. The Policy Committee of the Academic Senate received the report and prepared a recommendation for a six-year renewal also.

MPSI STRENGTHS INDICATED BY CIAC-II

Conducting impactful and relevant funded research on urban populations. Since the last re-charter (2010), the MPSI faculty have generated \$11.4 million in external grant support (FY2011-2016), averaging \$2.3 million annually. It is difficult to compare to the funding levels during the prior review period because the total funding includes grants that are sometimes shared with departments. However, the Institute is bringing in sufficient funds to support their research mission. The faculty members are actively submitting proposals, with pending grants totaling over \$10 million. Some examples of funded research with relevance to urban populations include developmental cognitive neuroscience, the use of technology to improve the health of expectant mothers, teacher reflective function, and adolescent development following childhood sexual abuse. These research areas involve a number of collaborations both within and outside WSU, thus bringing value because of the broader impact of the work to other communities as well as enhancing the reputation of the University. Since 2009, MPSI has raised \$3.5 million (averaging \$500K annually) in the capital campaign. These funds have allowed for improvement to the Early Childhood Center program and the Freer House, a treasure in American art and architecture that honors Charles Lang Freer's unique role in America's cultural history.

MPSI faculty member publish an average of 2.3 papers per year, corresponding to 33 peer-reviewed publications per year, but slightly below their expected number of three publications per year (as stated in their self-study). This level of productivity may be reasonable given the administrative roles of some of the faculty and the possibility that the nature of conducting community-engaged research takes more time (quality vs. quantity). On the other hand, a majority of MPSI faculty do not have full-time teaching responsibilities. The impact of research is difficult to assess and criteria (*e.g.*, the use, and type of, impact factors) can be discipline specific. It should be noted however, that the faculty are highly engaged with the community, forging research partnerships for ongoing research and disseminating findings to direct beneficiaries. The university should consider developing guidelines that provide more weight to these activities given its designation as a Carnegie ranked community-engaged higher education institution.

MPSI is collaborating with parents and agencies in Detroit and the surrounding communities to develop the University-Parent Partnership (UPP), a cohort study/participant registry that will provide researchers with access to study participants. The registry will serve as an important resource for Wayne State investigators seeking to do translational, community-based research with Detroit children and families, and to facilitate community research partnerships. This registry will contribute to the vision outlined in WSU's strategic plan for meaningful engagement in its urban community.

Providing access to its faculty and facilities for collaborations and interdisciplinary research.

The nature of research in child and family development requires a multidisciplinary approach. The core faculty members in MPSI represent a range of disciplines including psychology, social work, and education, which brings in expertise from many areas. The interdisciplinarity is evident from the collaborative projects, joint grants and team publications. Beyond the core faculty, MPSI also attracts additional collaborations from nursing, psychology, social work and pediatrics. The external collaborators gave a number of examples that highlight the value added such as junior faculty mentoring (*e.g.*, grant writing and internal proposal reviews), assistance with connections to trainers and community partners and research cohorts, and co-mentoring of doctoral students. The designated campus space, however, does seem to be “self-contained” and less integrated with the campus at large. Like other campus destinations, parking for community engagement activities is limited, creating barriers to participation and consistent involvement.

Training graduate students and postdoctoral associates for careers in child and family development.

Since the last review, about 30 doctoral students have participated in research training experiences in MPSI. The Institute training model includes interdisciplinary mentoring teams for students and provides a number of important professional development and skill-building activities (including, for example, grant writing) for the trainees. The trainees (including postdoctoral researchers) attend the MPSI colloquium series, giving them unique opportunities to network with experts in a variety of areas outside of their specific disciplines and to engage with the community. The MPSI fellowship program provides financial support and opportunities for trainees to attend conferences, which is important for them to network and to make their work visible to the research community. This culture of mentoring and expanding their breadth of knowledge and experience clearly demonstrates added value through MPSI. The Institute is well-positioned to apply for an NIH training grant (T32) for graduate student and postdoctoral support, and they are encouraged to identify target areas of research and other faculty so that they can submit an application within the next year. To this end, the MPSI leadership recognizes the importance of creating an intentional plan to identify and cluster faculty into teams of scientists and community-based researchers that can influence the health of children and families. This will meet the vision of the university and the Integrative Biosciences Center to address health disparities through research relevant to the urban area.

Engaging the community and translating research into policy and practice. The Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium, which is led by a team including MPSI faculty and the director of Healthier Urban Families program, includes 19 early childhood centers in Midtown

and downtown Detroit along Woodward Avenue and serve about 1500 children (50% in Detroit). They provide training and coaching to youth and parents, with topics such as stress management. This partnership was another good example of value added by MPSI because the strong relationships that are developed will allow additional research collaborations to be established more quickly and effectively. Furthermore, external agencies looking for research support can easily connect with the Institute through existing partnerships.

MPSI contributes to the well-being of Metro Detroit's children and families and the professionals who serve them. Its outreach programs offer training, information, and support to parents and grandparents, and continuing education, professional development, coaching, and mentoring to child and family professionals. As detailed in section 1(a) above, the University-Parent Partnership (UPP), Healthier Urban Families (HUF), and the Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium are among the programs effectively engaged in these activities, as are the two campus-based early childhood centers affiliated with MPSI and the College of Education. The Kresge Foundation's recent award of funds to plan a project similar to the Woodward Consortium in the Northwest neighborhood of Livernois and 6 Mile is additional evidence that MPSI contributes to WSU's mission to be meaningfully engaged in its urban community.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY CIAC-II FOR NEXT CHARTER PERIOD

In line with what MPSI stakeholders have recognized as areas to work on, the committee recommends that before the next review MPSI:

- Establish and/or enhance collaborations with other departments in order to successfully compete for T32 grant
- Recruit a strong scholar from a traditionally underrepresented group to increase its diversity
- Work to promote and recruit scholars and students from a diverse range of disciplines
- Continue to work with the Board of Visitors to enhance their fundraising/development roles for sustaining MPSI initiatives and overall mission
- Increase the average number of publications to three per year
- Invest in defining, developing, and tracking impacts and outcomes that includes agreed upon standards of publishing for the MPSI faculty (e.g., citations, reviews and impact factors), attribution of revenue related to research grant awards, student/post-doc outcomes (e.g., job placements) and community engagement effects. This would be instrumental for the T32, as well as provide an appropriate framework for assessing the MPSI faculty's level of research productivity and quality.