



# **The Future of the Social Science Research Institute at Duke: A Report of the SSRI Planning Committee<sup>1</sup>**

**June 25, 2012**

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<sup>1</sup>The Committee wishes to thank Mindy Miller of the Provost's Office for all her help in facilitating the Committee's meetings and scheduling and Christine Soares for her editorial assistance in taking the collection of members' text and making it look like and read like a Committee's Report.

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## Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A. Brief background on SSRI origins and structure</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>B. Alternative Models for Supporting Social Science Research: A Brief Look at Our Peers</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>C. SSRI in the Near Term: Findings and Recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Principles and Priorities for SSRI</i>	15
<i>Specific Recommendations</i>	16
1. SSRI-West	16
2. Research data support	19
3. SSRI's Education function	22
4. Grants administration support	23
<b>D. Issues for SSRI to Consider in the Longer Term</b>	<b>26</b>

## Summary

The SSRI Planning Committee was formed in February 2012 to consider the future direction of the Duke Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) and, in particular, “the optimal way” to meet the Institute’s challenges, in both infrastructure and programs, with the goal of “advancing our interdisciplinary aspirations in the social sciences.” The Committee’s report below presents our recommendations for concrete steps we believe will best direct the Institute’s organizational capital over the near term to fulfill that mission.

Since SSRI was founded less than a decade ago, Duke’s leadership has made strategic investments in attracting ever better social science faculty and graduate students, enhancing Duke’s national stature and putting SSRI in a strong position to have major research and educational impacts in the social sciences. To sustain this vision and maximize the potential of this tremendous talent pool, the Committee encourages Duke’s and SSRI’s leadership to target its investments in the near term toward facilitating collaboration and engagement of the social science research community and enhancing services that directly support those priorities.

### SSRI Today

In assessing the Institute’s challenges and opportunities going forward and how to meet them most effectively, the Committee examined the current structure and functioning of SSRI, one of Duke’s seven signature University-level Institutes. Created in 2003 as the “Social Science Research Center” within Trinity College of Arts & Sciences, the organization grew within its first two years to include several offices, including the Office of Interdisciplinary Research; the Office of Data, Methods and Research Facilities; and the Office of Proposal Development and Administration as well as affiliated Research Centers. In 2005–06, SSRC moved to its current Erwin Mill location, where its first experimental research and computing labs were opened. In 2006–07, SSRC became SSRI, and today encompasses some 12 Research Centers as well as the Duke Population Research Institute, four SSRI Programs and Initiatives and several supporting service Cores that include the Data Services Core, Education Core and Administration and Research Development Core.

### A Look at Our Peers

The Committee also analyzed comparable organizations dedicated to social science research at peer institutions across the U.S. and interviewed the leadership of many of them to learn what challenges these groups have faced and overcome. Despite the great diversity of approaches to supporting the work of social scientists this survey encountered, it yielded several valuable lessons about the key determinants of success at any institution.

Whether leadership and governance is more top-down or more distributed and diffuse, a common message kept coming through in our discussions with sources at peer institutes: faculty involvement and “buy-in” is key to a thriving institution and to sustaining interdisciplinary collaboration within the social sciences.

For both, faculty need direct support and resources that facilitate the research activities and the training of future generations that garner recognition, funding and, ultimately, contribute to new knowledge. Targeted investments in infrastructure, services and physical spaces that maximize faculty engagement and productivity have paid off at many of our peer institutions, and their examples can inform the priorities that guide the next steps Duke’s SSRI takes to achieve its own goals.

## Recommendations of the Committee

With the insights gained from the Committee's investigations and deliberations, and an understanding of the specific circumstances of SSRI, the Committee agreed that a set of **six key principles and priorities should guide the SSRI leadership** in its near term decisions and development.

- i. To advance the Institute's interdisciplinary aspirations and make the most of the talent and experience embedded in the SSRI community, SSRI should encourage and enable **greater faculty involvement** with a **'bottom-up' orientation**, particularly with respect to developing new research initiatives.
- ii. SSRI leadership should work to **develop wider involvement** in SSRI by Duke's social science research community, in particular improving outreach to these constituents so they know what resources are available to them and can become more involved in the development of new resources and activities.
- iii. SSRI should develop its role within the Social Sciences community at Duke as an **incubator of new research**. In that role, SSRI should be helping groups to assess the viability of potentially innovative and interdisciplinary projects, providing support to take such projects to "proof of concept" stages and helping to identify and develop potential funding sources for them to get off the ground.
- iv. SSRI should take a leadership role in ensuring that the Social Science research community at Duke has **stable, customer-oriented and efficient research support services** — whether they involve funding, training or data. SSRI's focus should be on ensuring that these services are provided, regardless of whether SSRI provides them.
- v. In implementing the above and other priorities and activities, the Committee encourages SSRI and its leadership to **avoid over-committing** the Institute's financial and human resources; rather SSRI should **focus on managing and exceeding expectations** to engender confidence both within and externally.
- vi. The Committee recognizes that its **recommendations will likely require additional resources**. We encourage the Provost's Office to commit them. But we also urge SSRI leadership to explore additional ways of funding these high-priority activities, including reallocation of existing funds and the cost-recovery of services that SSRI provides.

These guiding principles and priorities led the Committee to make **specific recommendations for action in four areas that SSRI should undertake in the near-term:**

### 1. Create SSRI West

The committee looks upon the possibility of acquiring vacant space in the Gross Chemistry Building on West Campus as a unique opportunity to create a vibrant "place" for SSRI that will encourage the very engagement, interaction and collaboration we believe is essential to the health and future of the Institute.

In designing SSRI West, the Committee thinks it is important that this place become the incubator for research in the social science community at Duke, both literally and figuratively.

More specifically, SSRI West should be designed to have fluid space that will attract scholars from throughout the campus for spontaneous and planned engagements. SSRI West also should contain SSRI's programmatic and support operations, including a help desk (see below) and data collection library, as well as open project space, break-out rooms and training rooms. The availability of engaging space and accessible and consumer-focused services has the promise to make SSRI West the hub for SSRI's needed role of fostering new, innovative and researcher-driven interdisciplinary research.

In short, as detailed in the full report below, the Committee conceives of the development of SSRI West as more than just a space plan. Rather, its development will prioritize the growth of

new projects, maximize collaboration and encourage a sense of community, as well as make SSRI's operations as open as possible and accessible as possible. Indeed, we believe that SSRI West can serve as a model for interdisciplinary collaborative space that could be replicated by other Institutes at Duke. We urge the Duke administration to provide the space and resources to make SSRI West a reality.

## **2. Expand Research Data Support at SSRI**

Data collection and analysis are central to the dual missions of incubating and supporting interdisciplinary research in the social sciences, therefore supporting research and training in data collection and analysis should be a top priority of SSRI. These efforts are critical to creating a collaborative research community, maximizing research productivity and strengthening Duke's ability to attract and retain top-tier faculty and students.

There has been a fundamental evolution in the nature and scope of social science data in recent years and this new data environment and the analyses of it present many challenges. At the same time, these conditions create opportunities for innovation. The Committee encourages SSRI to seize these opportunities by expanding some of its existing activities and facilitating others. In the full report, the Committee makes several sets of recommendations.

First, the Committee recommends that SSRI expand research support services to help address faculty and student data and statistical questions, including training workshops, a regularly staffed help-desk within SSRI West as well as more customized one-on-one advising. In this domain, we encourage SSRI to improve and expand the training it provides in data collection and analyses in order to keep pace with the skill sets needed to deal with increasingly complex designs for and sources of data.

Second, the Committee also encourages the SSRI leadership to consider ways in which it can be both innovative and cost-effective in the generation of new data. SSRI should identify ways to encourage innovations in methods for data collection and analysis. It might also consider developing an on-going data collection "platform" to gather information from population-representative samples on the Triangle population that can be used as a test-bed for new ideas and methods, especially ones that may lead to funded research and provide a "learning laboratory" for students to learn data collection methods. In addition, this effort could provide a unique "Duke brand" on the views and status of the local community.

Third, the Committee encourages SSRI to explore ways to tie in to the Big Data initiatives under development at Duke. The full report offers a number of explicit suggestions for ways to do this.

Finally, the Committee notes in the full report that the growing number of data sets in the social sciences that place restrictions on their use because of the confidential and/or sensitive nature of the information they contain impose new and ever more complex requirements on faculty and students who want to use them and on the university to provide the security this use entails. We recommend that SSRI and one of its centers (DuPRI) be supported in expanding their efforts to facilitate access and use of these data sets in ways that safeguard their security.

## **3. Integrate and Promote the Education Function of SSRI**

The Committee also offers a number of recommendations concerning SSRI's education function, some of which are noted in the preceding sections of this Summary. In many ways, we think SSRI has done a fairly good job in this domain. However, it has been hampered by its current location (the Erwin Mills Building) being far removed from most students, especially undergraduates, and limited resources to support the training and advising of students (and faculty). As discussed in the full report, we see SSRI's training programs and educational offerings as an area of strength that is primed for future growth.

However, as the Committee notes in the full report, additional investments are necessary for

SSRI's potential to be realized and we outline some specific areas in need of such investments. Again, we note that these educational activities and the development of help desk for students will be greatly facilitated by relocating SSRI's education and training services to SSRI West. Indeed, we see these educational and training functions to be a signature feature of SSRI's presence on West campus and a gateway to Institute resources for our students. In addition, the Committee thinks that an adequately staffed and funded expansion of these programs could help contribute to initiatives such as DukeIDEAS and could help facilitate greater involvement of more undergraduates and graduates in ongoing social science research projects by Duke faculty.

#### **4. Upgrade and Refocus SSRI Grants Administration Support**

Consistent with the goal of making the most efficient and effective use of time and resources, the Committee urges SSRI leadership to make grants administration a priority for attention. An outstanding grants administration operation can facilitate interdisciplinary research by helping groups of faculty to identify, compete for and win funding. Grants administrators and faculty should feel that they are on the same team, that they share common objectives and can work together to identify and solve problems, and that all benefit when a proposal is funded. Achieving these goals at SSRI is complicated by several factors. We describe some of these in our full report and offer specific suggestions for reorganizing the grants administration function to serve the needs of the SSRI community.

Consistent with our recommendations concerning development of SSRI West and its role as an incubator for new collaborative research projects, the Committee recommends that SSRI focus more of its resources on helping nascent groups to identify potential external funding sources and develop grant proposals to fund the research of these groups.

At the same time, the Committee recommends that SSRI should not insist on, or even prioritize, being the only provider of grants administration services for social scientists, nor should the Provost's office encourage a system in which SSRI has a monopoly on grants management. Rather, SSRI's priority should be to facilitate grants management so that faculty have reliable access to stable, highly experienced and competent staff, regardless of whether these staff are part of SSRI. If other arrangements provide services that meet PIs' needs, they should continue and not necessarily be centralized within SSRI. In short, we recommend that SSRI should recognize that a "one size fits all" approach is unlikely to succeed and may not even be the most cost effective option.

Finally, the Committee recommends that SSRI leadership and other grants-oriented groups in the social sciences at Duke, with the support of the Provost's office, work with Duke Human Resources to develop job descriptions, classifications and salary ranges for these positions so that new hires will have the skills and experience to be successful in dealing with the administration of the range of grants being submitted by and awarded to Duke's social science faculty.

### **SSRI Considerations for the Future**

Although the report Committee has intentionally focused on concrete steps SSRI can take in its next few years, we did consider some longer-term issues that we anticipate SSRI and its future leadership will need to address at some point down the road.

The first, somewhat implied in our discussion of the best ways to incubate interdisciplinary research, is an evaluation of the balance between creating Centers and fostering new research projects. To date, SSRI has focused on creating Centers and now houses some seventeen Centers and Programs covering a variety of substantive and/or methodological domains. While we do not wish to second-guess this strategy, we do see a need for SSRI to become more entrepreneurial, focusing on smaller-scale and more time-limited sets of activities that help to create "research startups." We think this focus on incubating new research projects that are

interdisciplinary in nature and sustained by the ideas developed by groups of faculty and students has the promise of innovation and advancing science in ways that may not always originate from any of the existing Centers within SSRI. Thus, in the short run the Committee would suggest that SSRI be very reluctant to create or take on any additional Centers. In the longer run, SSRI will need to determine what balance it wants to strike between maintaining and supporting its Centers and devoting resources to fostering and incubating new research projects. That balance is not obvious at this juncture and it will likely depend on the relative success of its Centers and of SSRI's ability to foster innovation. The Institute will need to begin thinking about this issue soon, and, importantly, how to evaluate success, which is our second point.

A second consideration is how to evaluate the success or failure of SSRI's and its centers' activities. As we note below, all of the peer institutions we evaluated have had to wrestle with this issue. At one extreme, an organization can disproportionately judge success by the ability of activities to be supported by extramural funding. Such a "soft money" orientation has its drawbacks, including creating perverse incentives for researchers. At the same time, the peer-review process that sustains research funders like NIH and NSF as well as many private foundations, is often a credible and impartial means of evaluating the merit of ideas. In contrast, internal review processes can lack the critical and impartial nature that ensures the best work is well supported and weaker research receives less. The Committee did not reach a consensus recommendation on this issue, but in the coming years, SSRI and Duke, with the involvement of Duke faculty, are going to have to determine how best to ensure that their investments in research are properly and critically evaluated.

A final important consideration going forward is how SSRI can ensure the support and commitment of Duke's schools and departments over the longer term. SSRI has been a unit that reports to the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies and its funding is provided by the Office of the Provost. There are sound reasons for this arrangement and our conversations with previous SSRI Directors have indicated that SSRI always has received strong financial and moral support from the Provost's Office. At the same time, it is our sense that there has not always been "buy in" by the deans of the various schools on campus with presences in the social sciences. Moreover, the social science departments and their chairs have varied in their degree of support for and cooperation with SSRI. While some of this may result from rivalries and desires to protect turf, some has resulted from a lack of faculty involvement in SSRI and its activities. While we do not wish to suggest we have enough information or adequate insight into this set of issues, the Committee does urge the new SSRI leadership, the Vice-Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies and the deans of the relevant schools to consider ways of improving these relationships between SSRI and the schools and departments, including how these various units are involved in the governance of SSRI and consider whether it makes sense for these units to have some "skin" in the SSRI game on behalf of their social science faculty. As we discuss in the full report, we see some important signs of improved collaboration within the Duke administration that, in the Committee's view, bodes well for the future of SSRI.

## Introduction

In February, 2012 Susan Roth, Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies, and Angela O’Rand, Dean of the Social Sciences, formed the SSRI Planning Committee to provide the Provost’s Office with a report on future directions of the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) at Duke. In particular, the Committee was asked to consider “the optimal way to meet the challenges of Duke’s Social Science Research Institute, both in terms of infrastructure and programs” with the goal of “advancing our interdisciplinary aspirations in the social sciences.” In this Report, we provide our views on how SSRI might direct its organizational capital over the near term to meet the aspirations of Duke and its social science community.

It is the considered sense of this Committee that the social sciences at Duke have made important advances over the last decade. In our view, Duke has not just maintained, but significantly strengthened, its social science faculty during a period of intense competitive pressures from peer institutions for the best and the brightest. It also has been able to attract ever better graduate students to Duke, both in its disciplinary departments and in its professional schools. The social science faculty at Duke has continued to provide courses and academic programs that Duke’s undergraduates find attractive, as evidenced by the popularity of a number of its majors and minors. Finally, the Committee notes an increasing tendency for the research of Duke’s social science faculty and students to cross disciplinary boundaries.

These advances have not happened by chance. Rather, they are the result of the support of Duke’s academic leadership, especially that of the Provost and the deans of Trinity College and the Sanford, Fuqua and Nicholas Schools. This leadership helped marshal the resources that made the faculty hiring/retentions and graduate student recruitment possible. This leadership also supported cluster hirings in Psychology and Neuroscience and the Population Sciences that significantly enhanced Duke’s national stature in these areas and the hiring of the next generation of senior faculty that will help to ensure the continued pre-eminence of Duke in areas within political science and sociology. In our view, this leadership and vision puts Duke in a strong position to have major research and educational impacts in the social sciences over the coming years.

As we all know, however, maintaining any institution’s standing and further encouraging its excellence require a continued focus on ways of facilitating the innovations and contributions of its faculty and our students. Thus, the Committee’s charge to assess and make recommendations about the future of one of the University’s signature institutes is worthwhile “due diligence,” made all the more timely by the change in SSRI’s leadership.

Over the past several months, as the Committee looked forward to consider what “next steps” SSRI might take, we consulted with a number of people and examined social science institutes and centers at peer institutions in order to better understand different models for fostering and supporting social science research. In addition, we took a close look at SSRI’s current and past operations to identify opportunities for adjustments that would support the Institute’s overarching priorities and goals going forward. We did not undertake a full-blown review or evaluation of SSRI of the sort that is typical of the periodic external review that academic departments undergo — first, this was not our charge, and second, it is our understanding that such an external review will be done in the next 3–5 years as part of a routine cycle of reviews of all of Duke’s interdisciplinary institutes. Our Committee therefore focused on developing a set of recommendations for SSRI over the “near term” between now and the time of its first external review. These are based on principles and priorities the Committee identified as central to the goals of meeting SSRI’s current challenges and advancing our interdisciplinary aspirations.

Following a brief review of SSRI’s origins and current structure in Section A of this report, we provide summary highlights of our survey of peer institutions in Section B, along with the key lessons for SSRI that investigation yielded. The heart of our report, Section C, outlines the principles and priorities the Committee believes should guide the near-term actions of leadership



going forward and the Committee's specific recommendations for those activities. These recommendations range from a detailed discussion of how SSRI should configure and organize space it might acquire on West campus in the next year, to what we consider to be "mid-term corrections" SSRI needs to make in the services it provides and, more importantly, in the outreach and provision of services and support to a broader segment of Duke's social science faculty and its graduate and undergraduate students. In addition, the Committee considered a set of issues that, while important, cannot be resolved in the short term and require longer and more detailed assessments than our Committee can provide. Therefore, we don't offer specific recommendations on these issues, which include the proper balance between the creation of Centers and the fostering of new research projects, as well as how to evaluate the success of SSRI's activities and investments and how SSRI can ensure the support and commitment of the Colleges and Schools and Departments at Duke. We identify these longer-term issues, however, to put them on the agenda of SSRI's new leadership in the hope that it will begin to work through and address them in the coming years.

## A. Some Brief Background on SSRI

### SSRI's Origins

The Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) began as the “Social Science Research Center” (SSRC) (together with the PARISS program) within Trinity College of Arts & Sciences in 2003–04. The founding director, John Aldrich, was joined by Wendy Wood as Co-Director in 2004–05. That year saw the initiation of several offices within SSRC, including the Office of Interdisciplinary Research; the Office of Data, Methods and Research Facilities; and the Office of Proposal Development and Administration. Gary Gereffi’s Center on Globalization, Governance and Competitiveness became the first SSRC affiliated center and the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences (REGSS) became the first new center seeded by SSRI. In 2005–06, SSRC moved to its current Erwin Mill location, where its first experimental research and computing labs were opened. The first faculty fellows program was also convened during that year. The following year, SSRC formally became one of Duke’s seven signature University-level Institutes. Over the ensuing years, first under the co-directors Aldrich and Wood and then under the directorship of Phil Morgan (2008–2012), SSRI expanded its grant, research and education infrastructure while engaging a number of existing and new centers as affiliates. The most recent additions, not reflected in the illustration below, are the Emerging China Research Center and the Behavioral Science and Policy Center.

### SSRI Today



## **SSRI LEADERSHIP**

Director, S. Philip Morgan<sup>1</sup>

SSRI Advisory Board: [www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=people/advisory-board](http://www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=people/advisory-board)

SSRI Steering Committee: [www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=people/steering-committee](http://www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=people/steering-committee)

## **INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT WITHIN SSRI**

Data Services Core (DSC) ([dsc.ssri.duke.edu](http://dsc.ssri.duke.edu)), Jerome Reiter, Director

Education Core ([ssri.duke.edu/?q=education-training](http://ssri.duke.edu/?q=education-training)), John Aldrich and Scott de Marchi, Co-Directors

Administration and Research Development ([ssri.duke.edu/?q=research-development-and-grants-administration](http://ssri.duke.edu/?q=research-development-and-grants-administration)), Gwendolyn Wright, Administrative Director

## **SSRI PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES**

Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology (DISM) ([dism.ssri.duke.edu](http://dism.ssri.duke.edu)), D. Sunshine Hillygus, Director

Duke Interdisciplinary Initiative in Social Psychology (DIISP) ([ssri.duke.edu/?q=diisp](http://ssri.duke.edu/?q=diisp)), Mark Leary, Director

Program for Advanced Research in the Social Sciences (PARISS) ([ssri.duke.edu/?q=pariss](http://ssri.duke.edu/?q=pariss)), John Aldrich and Scott de Marchi, Co-Directors

Duke University Energy Initiative ([www.energy.duke.edu](http://www.energy.duke.edu)), Richard Newell, Director

## **SSRI RESEARCH CENTERS**

Behavioral Science and Policy Center ([ssri.duke.edu/behavioral-science-policy-center](http://ssri.duke.edu/behavioral-science-policy-center)), Sim Sitkins, Co-Director

Center for Advanced Hindsight (C4AH) ([advanced-hindsight.com](http://advanced-hindsight.com)), Dan Ariely, Director.

Center for Child and Family Policy (CCFP) ([www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu](http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu)), Kenneth Dodge, Director.

Center on Globalization, Governance & Competitiveness (CGGC) ([www.cggc.duke.edu](http://www.cggc.duke.edu)), Gary Gereffi, Director

Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Social Sciences (REGSS) ([regss.ssri.duke.edu](http://regss.ssri.duke.edu)), Kerry L. Haynie and Paula D. McClain, Co-Directors

Center on Biobehavioral Health Disparities Research (BHDR) ([healthdisparities.ssri.duke.edu](http://healthdisparities.ssri.duke.edu)), Keith Whitfield, Director

Research Network on Racial and Ethnic Inequality (The Network or RNREI) ([thenetwork.ssri.duke.edu](http://thenetwork.ssri.duke.edu)), William Darity, Director

Emerging China Research Center ([www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=emerging-china-research-center-0](http://www.ssri.duke.edu/?q=emerging-china-research-center-0)), John Aldrich and Liu Kang, Co-Directors

Duke Center for Interdisciplinary Decision Sciences (D-CIDES)

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Morgan will step down as the Director of SSRI on June 30, 2012.

[www.dibs.duke.edu/research/d-cides](http://www.dibs.duke.edu/research/d-cides)), Scott Huettel, Director

**Duke Network Analysis Center (DNAC)** ([dnac.ssri.duke.edu](http://dnac.ssri.duke.edu)) , James Moody, Director

**Duke University Population Research Institute (DuPRI)** ([www.dupri.duke.edu](http://www.dupri.duke.edu)), Seth Sanders, Director

**Center on the Demography of Aging** ([staging2.ssri.duke.edu/aging.php](http://staging2.ssri.duke.edu/aging.php)), James Vaupel, Director

**Center for Population Health and Aging (CPHA)** ([www.dupri.duke.edu/cpha/index.php](http://www.dupri.duke.edu/cpha/index.php)), Kenneth Land and James Vaupel, Co-Directors

## B. Alternative Models for Supporting Social Science Research: A Brief Look at Our Peers

Most major universities have an organization devoted to interdisciplinary, large-scale social science analogous to SSRI, although their allocations of roles, functions and funding vary significantly. To get a sense of the variety of possible models and the aspects of those approaches our peer institutions have found to be most successful, Members of the Committee interviewed current and past directors of social science research organizations around the country and analyzed a pair of smaller organizations that also offer valuable examples. Below, we summarize the highlights of our findings about the organizations that provide useful lessons as we assess and address SSRI's challenges and opportunities going forward.

### Summary of Findings from Peer Social Science Research Organizations

**Columbia University – Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP):** ISERP ([iserp.columbia.edu](http://iserp.columbia.edu)) provides research support from pre-proposal idea formation through to dissemination and publication support for large-scale interdisciplinary social science across a diverse spectrum of topics. ISERP includes over 140 faculty fellows and 325 program affiliates, and is funded through returns on grant overhead and tuition from a quantitative social science masters program. ISERP is an “omnibus” organization that will work on any substantive topic of general interest to the faculty. It has an active seed grant program that, according to the director, really works because of the strong monitoring and personal development energies of the staff. Because it is largely self-sustained through grant overhead, there is a strong emphasis on grant submission and support. At the same time, in order to ensure intellectual energy and diversity, we were told that there “is always something going on at ISERP,” including training, research seminars and workshops.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: In contrast to Duke, ISERP's model depends on the return of overhead to the institute, this is what drives the incentive structure to get people invested in the programs (the institute has a sharing model where some portion of the overhead comes back to investigators). This does put ISERP in competition to other support centers, but the success has made ISERP largely independent and it aligns incentives for investigators so they have an interest in the Institute's success. Like SSRI at Duke, ISERP does not have a particular substantive focus and topics studied by faculty cover the gamut of social science. Like many places, ISERP is also now moving toward “big data” and computation.

**Cornell University – Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research (CISER):** CISER ([ciser.cornell.edu](http://ciser.cornell.edu)) provides support for computation and data needs among social scientists at Cornell. This is a very focused organization that does analysis and data support (including secure data services), but does not do grant, education or other administrative service work. This is purely an analysis support system.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: The support for secure data and analysis is very good and suggests that if we want to succeed at that level of support (which seems a key role for SSRI) we'll need to invest strongly in computation support staff and scalable computing architecture for data and analysis.

**Harvard University – Institute for Quantitative Social Science (IQSS):** Arguably one of the largest “area focused” social science research organizations reviewed, IQSS ([www.iq.harvard.edu](http://www.iq.harvard.edu)) is squarely focused on expanding the next frontier for social science in the advancement of quantitative methods and big data. IQSS directs large interdisciplinary research

projects, builds infrastructure that facilitates research, houses research groups and centers and administers professional staff and IT. There is a large staff (58 core staff, 136 grad students, 97 faculty) and large direct investment from Harvard.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: Like ISERP, IQSS has a broad substantive mission, but with more focused energy on data services. Key to success (according to the director) is “having an entrepreneur at the helm” and building a community that gets people to cross paths, including a physical environment that allows people to “come for help, stay to interact on research and teaching.” This is clearly a successful organization, with national recognition for data archive and support, again reflecting a large university investment.

**University of Michigan – Institute for Social Research (ISR):** Michigan’s ISR ([www.isr.umich.edu](http://www.isr.umich.edu)) is a large (\$85M budget, 250 scientists) and long-standing (nearly 60 years) social science research organization. Semi-autonomous from UM, due to its extensive survey-based research arm. The ISR’s primary mission is “the planning and conduct of high-quality social science research [and] training of future generations.” ISR has only five centers, but these are large, well organized and very stable. Education is run through the centers, the ICPSR summer institutes and the Survey Research Center’s program in survey methodology are hallmark programs that signal the quality of the institute. Funding is mainly extramural (NSF, NIH, etc.) but it does receive faculty release-time support.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: A key feature is the “shared culture” of research entrepreneurship and mutual responsibility. Research faculty at ISR have “ownership” in the place and its future, the governance model is “bottom up,” and the directors typically come from this faculty and are considered stewards of the institute. The institute depends on the core of researchers who keep the place going, and ISR has primary appointment capacity. This speaks to intellectual incentives to building collaborative buy-in from faculty to SSRI, finding ways to make SSRI the “go to” place, where PIs have a stake is a question of aligning incentives and providing top-notch service.

**Penn State University – Social Science Research Institute (SSRI):** SSRI at Penn State ([www.ssri.psu.edu](http://www.ssri.psu.edu)) is a consortium of centers and projects, including the Penn State Population Center, a survey research center and the Children, Youth and Family consortium, plus a number of smaller centers. These are well-established, core centers. The governance structure is similar to Duke’s SSRI, i.e., the PSU-SSRI director is responsible to the administration, steering committee, etc. The Institute is centrally funded, but all indirects on grants go back to PIs. They invest in starting projects, then those projects “buy back” services from the Institute. There is lots of investment in developing proposals and working with faculty to do so, but no particular substantive focus. The leadership model is collaborative: the director is a “match maker” whose goal is to increase the visibility of Institute members’ good work. That said, they have a number of high-profile big-science signature projects that give visibility and panache to the Institute.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: While different from Duke’s SSRI in many ways, we think there are some notable lessons to learn from the operation and priorities of PSU’s SSRI. In particular, it appears that the PSU SSRI has had some real success in attempting to foster new research through helping to develop new and collaborative research ideas and to help identify and secure funding to support them, especially through competitive extramural funding mechanisms. Some of these efforts have procured some big-science signature projects for PSU and, in some cases, have developed into freestanding centers under this Institute’s umbrella. We also were struck at least by the perception by some of its faculty that the PSU SSRI does a good job of helping faculty get and manage grants. Furthermore, while some of these services are provided centrally within this Institute, some services, especially ones for faculty with more specialized needs (e.g., NIH grants) are delivered from one or more of its centers (e.g., the Penn State Population Research Institute).

**The RAND Corporation (RAND):** RAND ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)) is clearly a very different type of organization from Duke's SSRI or any of the other institutions we reviewed. But we focused in our comparison on what it is like to work at RAND (based on the experience of one of our Committee Members). One notable feature is that central funds support researcher time for writing proposals (researchers are otherwise mainly on soft-money). Provision of services at RAND is "very customer-oriented" — the grants support team "was on your side" and made sure things happened. The organization is loose, providing lots of opportunities and no barriers to interacting and working with people in different groups, including the "very helpful" ability to share staff and services across projects.

Lessons for Duke/SSRI: Key here is that researchers trusted the support staff and the support staff was extremely talented. For Duke, this suggests that one of the incentives SSRI could provide researchers would be top-notch, well-trained and knowledgeable support staff, who work with researchers rather than pose a barrier.

**Duke University – Center for Cognitive Neuroscience (CCN):** We felt it useful to contrast the omnibus nature of the SSRI with a more focused, smaller program like Duke's CCN ([www.mind.duke.edu](http://www.mind.duke.edu)). The CCN has been a remarkably successful program that integrates a PhD training program with top-notch interdisciplinary research. Founded in 1999 to fill a hole in Arts & Sciences, the program has 17 core faculty, 35 affiliated faculty and a large number of interdisciplinary grants. CCN's "Cognitive Science Admitting Program" has been very effective at attracting talented PhD students.

Lessons for SSRI: The strong commitment of a focused faculty has been key to the Center's success, though as the program has grown there is a natural challenge integrating faculty without alienating them from home departments. A clear, open leadership plan has been very useful.

## Overarching Lessons from Our Peers

The range of styles and activities of SSRI-like organizations across the nation is wide (we've also reviewed briefly such institutes at Indiana, Stanford, U. of Washington, UCLA, etc.) and there are many routes to success, but we found the following considerations were repeatedly identified as key:

- **Leadership style – "Bottom up" vs. "Entrepreneurial."** Institutes like IQSS (Harvard) and ISERP (Columbia) have strong leaders (Garry King and Peter Bearman, respectively) who take an active role in shaping the direction of the institute. Others (Michigan's ISR or Penn State's SSRI) have a much more open and democratic leadership style with broad faculty engagement. Some of this difference owes to the age of the institutes; the older institutes have developed broader-based support and involvement. The advantage of an entrepreneurial leader is the flexibility and drive that a strong personality can bring to garnering resources and extramural attention as well as the ability to inspire others. The cost of a strong personality is that the institute risks becoming "just" a reflection of that individual, which can make leadership transitions difficult. When it works (ISERP, IQSS), this model seems to turn on the strong leader having deep respect and appreciation for the work of others, while providing resources that make the center worthwhile for all members.
- **Building Investigator buy-in and aligning incentives.** All directors we spoke to emphasize the importance of making the organization a place where people want to be: everyone has extreme time pressure, so there has to be a reason to engage with the research organization. This can be done through direct incentives (indirect returns, as at PSU or ISERP) or unique services

(data/analysis - IQSS, CISER; grant support - ISR, RAND). In most of the cases reviewed, intellectual density (training, talks, workshops, etc.) is important for building community, but needs balance against other time commitments.

- **“Place” and “Space.”** Having a location where people are actively present and can comfortably interact was something that came up in our interviews with several of SSRI’s peer institutes/centers. A key and consistent finding was that “place *and* space matter.” The location needs to be convenient enough to foster “drop-by” use and organized around active participation. While some of the institutes provide faculty office space, this appears less important than key project and interaction space. The one advantage of having faculty office space appears to be that faculty can then walk “down the hall” to use services; but largely such space either goes unused (offices left empty) or is used as a place to hide. Offices for visiting faculty (of various terms) and research team space can be effective. The most common way to get people into the space and interact is through (a) seminars and classes, (b) conference space and (c) services such as statistics and data consulting, grant consulting, etc.
- **Funding Models.** The funding models used by these centers span a wide range. At one end we have institutes like ISERP that are fully self-funded through grant overhead and tuition from the quantitative Masters program. On the other, we have institutes running off large central endowments, such as IQSS in Harvard — which has now been extended to be a major part of the next Harvard capital campaign. Penn State’s SSRI is also centrally funded, with no kickback on indirect costs, but uses a pay-for-service model.
- **Intellectual Focus.** A key question that SSRI faces is whether its intellectual focus should be broad or more narrow and substantive vs. more methodological. Based on our reviews of peer research institutes, there seems to be a partial answer to this question. First, institutes supporting social science research tend to be broad-based in the substantive issues addressed, reflecting the fact that the social sciences themselves are quite broad. The extent to which these institutes were focused on specific substantive topics, they were organized as projects, programs, and centers within an institute, rather than attempting to coalesce faculty research around one or two signature themes as some of the other Institutes at Duke are organized. At the same time, we found that the peer research institutes we reviewed often devoted substantial amount of their resources and intellectual capital to the development of and innovation in the methods used in social science research. These efforts included innovation in the use of surveys to collect data; greater reliance on and integration of other modes of collecting information; integration of experimental designs within population-based surveys; and development of new software and methods for analyzing the large amounts of data increasingly available to social scientists. And some institutes supported significant and often influential efforts to educate the next generation in the methods of data collection and the tools to analyze such data.

## Summary

Whether leadership and governance is more top-down or more distributed and diffuse, a common message kept coming through in our discussions with sources at the peer institutes we reviewed: faculty involvement is key to a thriving institution and to sustaining interdisciplinary collaboration within the social sciences. For both, faculty need direct support and resources that facilitate the research activities and training of future generations that garner recognition, funding, and, ultimately, contribute to new knowledge. Targeted investments in infrastructure, services and physical spaces that maximize faculty engagement and productivity have paid off at many of our peer institutions, and their examples can inform and help guide the next steps that Duke’s SSRI takes to achieve its own goals.



## C. SSRI in the Near Term: Findings & Recommendations

In considering the near-term actions SSRI can take to strengthen and streamline its infrastructure and programs to advance its interdisciplinary aspirations, Members of the Committee have been informed by examples of successful practices and cultural principles at peer institutions — but also, and primarily, by the specific opportunities and challenges here at Duke. One of these, the opportunity to use currently vacant space in the Gross Chemistry Building, dovetails nicely with the larger objectives and “operating principles” that we think should help to focus, and in some cases re-orient, SSRI and its activities.

These guiding principles and priorities, described below, led our Committee to make recommendations in four specific areas, which we present below. In this section of the report, the background and rationale for each of our recommendations is described in detail, with relevant action items for each initiative. Very briefly, however, our first recommendation to create an “SSRI West” is based on a vision of how SSRI can best “incubate” new interdisciplinary research ideas and projects by Duke’s faculty in the social sciences. Our further recommendations focus on the need for SSRI to provide more in the way of services that efficiently and effectively use increasingly complex sources of data, and that foster the development of new data sources as well as new and creative ways of using them. We also offer our assessment of ways to improve the often contentious issues associated with grants administration by reorienting SSRI’s approach to one that is less centralized and more consumer oriented.

### Principles and Priorities for SSRI in the Near Term

- i. **Encourage greater faculty involvement with a ‘bottom up’ orientation** – SSRI and the Provost’s office have devoted resources to develop research centers and various initiatives (e.g., DukeIDEAS), and the committee understands the value of many of these activities and their top-down approach to stimulating new initiatives, especially ones not present at Duke. But the Committee thinks that SSRI also could benefit from a more bottom-up orientation, particularly with respect to developing new research initiatives at Duke. A more interactive and consultative governance structure, and information/consultation sessions with faculty in different departments and research areas are possible mechanisms for increasing faculty involvement.
- ii. **Improve Outreach** – Consistent with the previous point, we also urge SSRI’s leadership to develop a wider involvement of Duke’s Social Science Research Community in SSRI, both among faculty and students. Faculty and graduate and undergraduate students should know what resources are available to them, especially those not affiliated with an SSRI center. SSRI should also more actively involve these constituents in the development of new resources and activities. This might include evaluation of the current governance structure.
- iii. **Incubate Research** – SSRI should develop its role within the social sciences at Duke as the facilitator of new research projects. This should include: (a) helping/facilitating groups to assess the viability of potentially innovative and interdisciplinary projects; (b) providing support and resources for interdisciplinary groups to undertake needed “proofs of concept” in early stages of research; (c) helping to identify and develop viable funding schemes, including grant proposals to extramural funding sources (NSF, NIH, other government agencies, and private foundations), identifying potential donors and/or helping to establish longer-term Duke internal funding.
- iv. **Make practical the new sexy! Consumer-oriented services and delivery** – SSRI should take a leadership role in ensuring that the social science community at Duke has stable, customer-oriented and efficient research support services. SSRI’s focus should be on

ensuring such services are provided, regardless of whether it actually provides these services. Also, SSRI should work with faculty to determine which services and functions it can provide to best serve the needs of the broad range of faculty and not just its centers. For example, this would include expanding its help desk and workshop training activities directed at data collection and analysis issues and grant proposal writing of faculty and students.

- v. **Expand involvement but avoid over-commitment and over-promising** – We view these priorities as critical to building a successful institute and recognize that they might involve budgetary tradeoffs and further investment of resources from the university. Moreover, there will be pressure for SSRI, for example through initiatives like DukeIDEAS, to expand its involvement even more and to do so rapidly. But the Committee encourages SSRI and its leadership to avoid overextending and over-committing both its financial and human resources in the near term. At this stage of its existence, SSRI needs to work on managing and exceeding expectations. Doing so will help engender greater confidence within the organization and in the organization.
- vi. **Address budget and ways of funding it** – Realistically, expansion of SSRI services and incubation functions is likely to take some additional funding. The Committee has not attempted to cost-out these new activities, but we fully expect and encourage the Provost's Office to commit additional resources to fund them. The Committee also encourages the SSRI Leadership to explore alternative ways of funding these and other SSRI activities, including an expanded use of cost-recovery for services provided to existing SSRI centers and possibly from other units on campus (e.g., departments and schools) with faculty and students that are provided with discernable, value-added services. We also encourage the SSRI leadership to continue to examine ways of reallocating its existing funding to meet its highest priorities. Finally, we reiterate the importance of the principle noted above: SSRI needs to avoid committing to or accepting responsibilities for which it does not have the means of funding.

## Specific Recommendations in Detail:

### 1. SSRI in the Gross Chemistry Building: A Vision for SSRI-West

The committee recommends the creation of a new space for SSRI that is vibrant with activity and encourages the development of new projects — both scholarly and educational — that cross social science disciplines. Elements within this space would be explicitly fluid, so that they attract scholars from throughout campus for spontaneous and planned engagements across disciplines. To allow SSRI to fulfill its needed role as an incubator of new research, its new space should provide reasons for faculty and students to cross paths: seminars that cross departmental boundaries, new colloquia and conferences, data infrastructure and support services. Our goal is for SSRI to develop a *sense of place* that will be critical for building affiliation in the short term and for catalyzing new research in the long term.

#### Current Space Usage at SSRI

SSRI's primary physical footprint rests within the Erwin Mill building between Duke's West and East campuses. Of the approximately 34,000 square feet occupied by SSRI and its affiliated centers, about 20,000 square feet are directly occupied by centers and about 14,000 square feet provide infrastructure and administrative support. The non-center component of SSRI's space comprises:

DIISP labs	~4,800 sq ft
Conference Space	~1,450 sq ft
IT support	~1,100 sq ft
Data Core	~ 800 sq ft
Education Core	~1,250 sq ft
Grants Support	~1,050 sq ft
Kitchen/Service	~1,250 sq ft
Open/cubicles	~1,110 sq ft
Administration	~1,150 sq ft

### Challenges of Current Space

SSRI space (in Erwin Mill) poses challenges for the re-orientation of its mission as advocated in this report.

- **Incubation:** Physical separation from main West Campus increases the costs for new investigators to make use of SSRI resources. Erwin Mill space is better used by well-established and self-contained research groups, like some of SSRI's constituent Centers. Nascent projects would be better served by having research and program space closer to their faculty and students' home departments.
- **Collaboration:** Erwin Mill presents a disjointed and byzantine structure: separate entrances, long corridors, and closed offices. These features discourage interactions – even among individuals physically located on site – and limit the effectiveness of programs to attract non-resident visitors to Erwin Mill (e.g., Faculty Fellows program).
- **Project-based Research:** Erwin Mill lacks facilities that encourage open, flexible, and group-based interactions. There is no open space that attracts drop-in students for consultations or collaborations. Groups starting new projects do not have access to temporary space for brainstorming. Nor is current space readily re-configurable to accommodate new projects.

### Recommendations for Use of the New Space

We recommend that SSRI move its programmatic and support operations — but not its research Centers — to the vacant space within the Gross Chemistry building. We also make the following recommendations about configuring and prioritizing use of that space:

- The primary entrance should lead into an **open project space** that includes a **helpdesk**, tables for collaborative work, and ample seating for visitors. A good model for this space could be the entry to the LINK teaching facility, which has an open floor plan that attracts students for informal interactions. Ideally, people should flow through this common space on their way to other SSRI resources.
- Immediately off of the main project space should be a collection of **break-out rooms**. These rooms should have glass and whiteboard walls, A/V equipment, etc. Again, the LINK spaces could serve as a model. Such rooms would fall into two models:
  - **Unallocated rooms** that would be used by small groups on an ad-hoc basis. Reservations of those rooms would be limited, and there would be no semi-permanent storage space. As examples, such a room could be used by a group of faculty and students for brainstorming of

a new project, or by some graduate students who come over to SSRI for statistical consulting.

- **Allocated rooms** that are linked to specific projects on a time-limited basis. These rooms would have similar features, but would also have some storage space (e.g., a bookshelf and storage closet), so that a team could leave materials there. These rooms could be assigned to a group for a specified period of time (e.g., 3-, 6-, 9- or 12-month durations), based on applications to the SSRI leadership. As an example, an interdisciplinary team of faculty might use such a room for their brainstorming and group discussions over a two-month period of grant planning.
- Also adjacent to the main project space should be a set of **training rooms** for holding SSRI workshops, meetings and small conferences. Having participants pass through the project space on their way to these events would increase awareness of SSRI programs. Encouraging SSRI affiliates to spend time in its facilities before and after events — by working in the project space or coordinating project meetings to coincide with a lecture would be a key goal.
- **Support staff** who facilitate the research mission of SSRI should be moved into offices in Gross Chemistry. Staff associated with the data services and educational missions of SSRI should be located relatively close to the helpdesk, to encourage interactions with faculty and student affiliates. The SSRI leadership and grant and data support staff could be located elsewhere in the Gross Chemistry space.

A **data collection laboratory** should be included, especially if it can be configured in a way that makes use of space that can be used for other purposes, e.g., conducting training classes in statistical and survey methods, rather than having to be exclusively used for data collection.

Based on current space usage, this plan would require a minimum of 15,000 square feet. Of that total, about 7,000 sq ft would be associated with space for facilities and administration: creating on-campus testing laboratories (~2,000 sq ft); moving the data core and education core (~2,000 sq ft, in total); moving the administration (~1,000 sq ft), staff serving grants (~1,000 sq ft) and IT support (~1,000 sq ft.) The remaining space would be needed for project rooms, seminar rooms, gathering spaces, the helpdesk area, etc., which would collectively require approximately 8,000 sq ft.

## Summary

The West Campus space should become what most faculty and students think of as “SSRI”, with other space (primarily in Erwin Mill) continuing to serve affiliated centers. In fact, we do not believe that West Campus space should be provided as permanent space to *any* affiliated center, but rather that it should serve as project and incubator space as well as house infrastructure services for faculty and students. The needs for expansion and consolidation of centers could be partially met through use of the space that would open up in Erwin Mill, potentially in turn freeing up their space elsewhere on campus for other purposes.

The overarching themes of our recommendations for SSRI West are to prioritize the growth of new projects, to maximize collaboration, to encourage a sense of community through a common space and to make SSRI’s operations as open as possible (in both literal and metaphorical senses). We view these themes as particularly important for SSRI, given its current state, but we also recognize that they have more general applicability. Thus, **we believe that the above recommendations could serve as a model for an interdisciplinary collaborative space that could be replicated by other Institutes at Duke.**

## 2. Expand Research Data Support at SSRI

Data collection and analysis are central to the dual missions of incubating and supporting interdisciplinary research in the social sciences. SSRI currently offers a variety of data services to social science faculty on campus. While the Committee recognizes the hard work of the SSRI staff, we believe it is a critical time for reinvigorating and expanding data-based services and activities. **We offer some specific recommendations below but would broadly emphasize that supporting research and training in data collection and analysis should be a top priority of SSRI.** These efforts are critical to creating a collaborative research community, maximizing research productivity and strengthening Duke's ability to attract and retain top-tier faculty and students.

It is worth highlighting that universities across the country have established centers and institutes dedicated to supporting data collection and analysis. The Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University recently noted, for example, that in the last few years they have been contacted by 20 other schools about how to establish a similar center at their institutions.

There has been a fundamental evolution in the nature and scope of social science data in recent years. Whereas sample surveys and aggregate government statistics once were the cornerstone of quantitative research in academics, business and government, there are now more and more diverse sources of data than ever before. Rather than asking a small sample of respondents about their attitudes and behaviors, data collection today might involve capturing information from business transactions, online activities, mobile devices or social media for millions of individuals. Data for psychological research is increasingly incorporating physiological measures like galvanic skin response, heart rate, hormone levels and brain imaging. Even the distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is being redefined with computerized text analysis of blog posts, twitter feeds and social networking communications. This new data environment presents many challenges but also creates opportunities for innovation.

SSRI should aim to provide the training, tools and intellectual community to take advantage of "big data" to solve global challenges. At the same time, traditional methods of data collection — survey and experimental methods — remain the staples of social science research. SSRI should provide expertise about the best practices for survey and experimental research methods and should contribute to improvements in these research methodologies.

### Current SSRI Data Services

SSRI's current data services are provided through its Data Services Core (DSC) and SSRI's programs and initiatives: The Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology (DISM), Duke Interdisciplinary Initiative in Social Psychology (DIISP) and Program for Advanced Research in the Social Sciences (PARISS). These activities are often coordinated and implemented through SSRI's Education Core. Before turning to our specific recommendations, we offer a brief overview of each of these groups.

The DSC offers consulting on statistical software, quantitative methods, social science data resources, geospatial resources and analysis, databases and online data interfaces, access to confidential datasets and social science computing. The DSC offers ongoing workshops including, for example, introductions to relevant software applications, statistical methodologies and database management. The DSC works extensively with existing and emerging centers affiliated with the SSRI, especially on website design and database development. The DSC is based on funding of approximately 2.5 FTEs, although it has a cost recovery model that enables it to hire additional staff to work on researcher-instigated projects.

The DISM offers consulting on the scientific measurement of attitudes and behaviors, whether in the traditional survey format, experiments, qualitative interviews or focus groups. DISM offers

one-on-one advising and workshops on all aspects of the survey process, including questionnaire design, pretesting, sampling, fielding of web instruments, etc. In collaboration with OIT, DISM has also developed and provided training for Qualtrics survey software. DISM services are provided through one post-doc and roughly 40% time of Alexandra Cooper, associate director for Education and Training.

DIISP offers a state-of-the-art lab on-site at the Erwin Mill building and a 37-foot Research Mobile. SSRI also offers graduate students conducting experimental research a modest (\$500) participant payment grant and provides administrative support to researchers who need to manage funds used for subject payments.

PARISS offerings include a graduate certificate in Advanced Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences, a speaker series presenting innovative social science research, a fellows program for advanced graduate students and, in collaboration with DISM, limited funding for original data collections. PARISS is supported by SSRI's Education and Training Core.

### **Recommendations for Expanded Data Support:**

- The Committee recommends that SSRI expand research support services, including one-on-one advising and training workshops (Practical is the new sexy!). SSRI should consider investing in a help-desk function on West Campus that can address student and faculty data and statistical questions in real-time.

In fiscal year 2011, the DSC worked with 20 project teams and offered one-off statistical consultation to 115 researchers (sometimes by referral to statisticians on campus), including many undergraduates. However, based on internal DSC surveys and conversations with stakeholders, there is clearly unmet demand for social science data services. Many stakeholders, especially students, do not utilize DSC services because they are unwilling to go to Erwin Mill; others are not aware of what the DSC offers. We believe that locating DSC staff on West Campus will help meet this demand, thereby improving the quality of social science research and education at Duke. We note that at 2.5 FTE the DSC is already at capacity with respect to one-off consulting, and it is likely to become highly under-resourced if located on West Campus.

In the last year, DISM offered one-on-one consulting on survey projects with 80 faculty, staff, or students. More than 400 registered for DISM-sponsored workshops and conferences. Although there is clearly a demand for expertise and training in survey methodology, and it is likely to grow with the move to West, there are two looming concerns. First, funding for the post-doc position that supports these activities is uncertain beyond academic year 2012–2013. Second, recruitment is difficult for this position. The DISM post-doc currently devotes nearly 100% of effort to advising and assisting survey projects and teaching workshops, leaving little time to develop a research portfolio. There also exists high demand in government and industry for individuals with survey methodology skills (one rationale for improving training at Duke), making attracting qualified candidates difficult. Possible solutions might include building a more formal fellowship program for two post-doctoral scholars or adding an FTE survey methodologist staff position.

SSRI should consider bringing in outside experts to teach workshops and short courses. The Odum Institute at UNC offers one such model. We also view these workshops as one way to build connections between SSRI and other Duke Initiatives (e.g., “Big Data” and the Triangle Census Research Network).

It's worth noting that many top universities (including UNC-Chapel Hill) have directly funded teams of PhD-trained staff to provide training and expertise in data collection, and

quantitative and qualitative analysis. High-quality, stable research support services are difficult to sustain through external funding alone. Such services are valuable not only in implementing existing awards — to which their effort can often be appropriately allocated and charged — but to developing proposals for such projects, services nowhere more needed or valuable than in today’s competitive funding environment.

- We recommend that SSRI improve and expand training in data collection and analysis.

Many SSRI workshops are well attended, but we expect attendance would improve if workshops were offered on West Campus and publicized more broadly to interested parties across the university.

Training in quantitative methodology in most social science fields has not kept pace with the growing complexity of data collected. Statistical methods are typically taught assuming simple random sampling with no missing data, yet that is rarely the type of data social scientists have available. The Committee urges SSRI to find ways to help train faculty and students to work with complex data.

Training in data collection is best accomplished through hands-on experience. Since Duke does not have (or want) a call center, SSRI should identify ways to support and facilitate original data collection efforts, especially by graduate students and junior faculty. This might include seed funding, omnibus survey opportunities, and curricular additions (e.g., a survey practicum).

- The Committee would like to encourage SSRI leadership to consider ways in which it can be both innovative and cost-effective in the generation of new data. We urge SSRI to encourage a group of faculty to develop this rationale and present it to the Duke administration and/or external funders. Here are some initial thoughts of the committee on elements to that rationale:

An ongoing data collection might be used as a test-bed to help develop and establish the feasibility of new methods or measures, survey content, and/or linking of data from various modes. One possibility is to make this Triangle-focused so that Duke becomes a source of information on the local population’s demographic characteristics, attitudes, views about local institutions, etc., which could represent a unique “Duke brand” on the views and status of the local community.

One potential methodological focus of a new data-generation initiative at Duke might be working on ways to improve the inferential value of non-probability samples, whether clinical studies, “big data” or web-based surveys. More generally, there are many open and high-impact research questions at the interface of big data analytics and social science, for example inferring from databases to populations and issues of privacy and confidentiality protection. There is a need to develop methodologies to make such data accessible, confidential and replicable.

New data collection efforts will provide a “learning laboratory” for students to learn data collection methods and will provide them original data for their own solo or collaborative research projects.

- We recommend that SSRI find multiple ways to tie in to the Big Data initiatives under development at Duke. For example, if the Big Data initiative includes an informatics team, the DSC could look to add an informatics/analytics expert who could work with social science researchers and be a bridge between the Big Data initiative and the SSRI. Because the

knowledge and skills to access and analyze new data sources do not belong in a single disciplinary field or even solely within academia, we recommend that SSRI find ways to bring together scholars and practitioners from the business, government, media, and non-profit sectors to encourage knowledge sharing and innovation.

- More generally, SSRI should identify ways to encourage innovations in methods for data collection and analysis. In particular, SSRI might offer conference funding or seed funding for high-risk, high-reward projects. We expect this is one area in which SSRI can successfully incubate new research.
- We see the growing importance of DSC efforts to help researchers obtain and use confidential or sensitive data sets. Typically, these data require researchers, faculty or students, to enter into Data Use Agreements (DUAs) with federal agencies and other data providers. The DSC has hired a staff member to work with faculty on DUAs, and we recommend that this position be continued and expanded. We also recommend that SSRI develop remote access systems that meet the security criteria of most data providers. Such systems exist, for example, at Cornell University (see report on CISER). A secure remote access system would offer researchers access to confidential data without the costs of being restricted to a specific computer, reduce the amount of effort researchers spend on DUA development and compliance and provide the University with a point of contact to ensure DUA compliance. We understand that the DSC is developing quotes and options for such systems, and we encourage SSRI to support this development. We also note that developing such a system is not likely to be feasible with only 2.5 FTEs; a larger staff is likely to be needed.

### **3. Integrate and Promote the Education Function of SSRI**

SSRI has made important contributions through its Education and Training Core. Of particular note are its workshops, which offer applied training to scholars (ranging from undergraduates to faculty) on topics including study design, research methods and the use of analytic software packages. The Core also provides a broad range of consultation services, including support for undergraduates undertaking honors theses (provided by PARISS fellows in their role as mentors and by SSRI staff), its promising (but under-resourced) drop-in help desk and input regarding the purchase and use of computing resources. The Core also provides support to the Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology.

These educational offerings fill a critical gap in social science research training at Duke. Given variability in departmental resources, SSRI's training activities offer substantial intellectual, operational and cost efficiencies. SSRI is especially well positioned in this regard, given the myriad synergies between training and the Institute's other activities. We believe that the activities of the educational core offer value in their own right. But they can do more than simply providing tools to, and dispatching, trained scholars. SSRI's education core holds considerable potential to serve as a springboard for new scholarship at Duke, bringing scholars from across and beyond the social and behavioral science disciplines together and thereby creating contacts and nurturing new collaborations.

In the Committee's view, SSRI's educational offerings represent an area of strength that is primed for future growth. However, additional investments are necessary for its potential to be realized.

#### **Recommendations for Enhancing the Education Function of SSRI**

- SSRI should ensure that its current, high-demand workshops remain available. Ideally, SSRI



would expand these offerings. Moreover, the Education and Training Core should conduct outreach to assess interest in possible new workshop topics. In developing new workshops, we encourage SSRI to leverage innovative instructional strategies (e.g., team based learning, case based approaches, webinars) and to engage a broader range of university stakeholders.

- In the Committee's view, SSRI's education and training services have been limited, in part, by the fact that most of these workshops and consulting activities were housed in the Erwin Mill Building, which has limited access and utilization, especially by undergraduates. To illustrate, while there is great demand for SSRI workshops (900 registrants in 2010–2011), attendance rates (325 individuals, 36%) show substantial room for growth. Relocating these activities to an SSRI location on West Campus, we think, would enhance the utilization of the consulting services and the attendance of the SSRI educational workshops. Indeed, SSRI's West Campus-based events consistently attract significantly better attendance.
- As noted elsewhere, we believe that high priority should be placed on the development of a West Campus-based help desk. The help desk has potential to be a signature feature of SSRI's presence on West campus and a gateway to Institute resources for our students. We expect demand for the service, which is already substantial, to increase with improved accessibility. Offering both training and consultation on West will attract scholars from across campus to enhance their skills, network and nurture new collaborations.
- We also encourage SSRI to strategically consider ways of expanding its educational activities, especially as they relate to initiatives such as DukeIDEAS. For example, SSRI may wish to develop ways to facilitate involvement by more undergraduates and graduate students in ongoing social science research projects by Duke faculty. SSRI could develop additional workshops to help reduce any initial research skill deficits of undergraduates who wish to work on a research team and to coordinate the educational and curricular aspects of such involvements. By taking on such responsibilities, SSRI can lower barriers that may limit faculty willingness to involve undergraduates in their research.
- At the same time, we suggest that SSRI be cautious and selective in expanding its involvement in new educational activities. Such activities can be time- and resource-intensive. Going slowly and selectively limiting commitments will help ensure that its educational offerings will be positive learning experiences for students and productive ones for faculty.

#### **4. Upgrade and Refocus SSRI Grants Administration Support**

An outstanding grants administration operation can facilitate interdisciplinary research by helping groups of faculty to identify, compete for and win funding. Grants administrators and faculty should feel that they are on the same team, that they share common objectives and can work together to identify and solve problems, and that all benefit when a proposal is funded. Achieving these goals at SSRI is complicated by several factors. We describe some of these and provide suggestions below.

Faculty members have different needs, which are difficult to accommodate with a one-size fits all approach. Single-investigator grants to support summer salary are much less complex than multi-investigator projects with multiple subcontracts. Faculty who occasionally write single-investigator grants have much less intense needs for support than faculty with multiple complex projects. Because of the array of different needs, it is not clear that recent efforts to consolidate all grants administration for social sciences within SSRI are well-founded.

The needs of some groups may be better met by grants administration operations that are

more specialized and that can provide cradle-to-grave services covering both pre- to post-award, where researchers have frequent face-to-face interactions with grants administrators, who know the details of the budgets and sub-contracts. Groups of social science researchers who are happy with the grants administrators they are working with should keep these arrangements in place.

It is the committee's strong sense that there is a need to re-evaluate and upgrade the skill levels (and salaries) for grants administrator positions in the social sciences. This would allow grant management to be done with fewer people who are more skilled and able to handle a wider range of responsibilities, as well as keeping abreast of changes in rules from funding agencies and helping address needs related to IRB and data safeguarding. It is our hope that this arrangement will result in a grants administration staff that is better able to address the needs of faculty members and their research projects, with less staff turnover and better morale among grant administrators (and faculty).

Leaders of grants management teams need to develop a sense of customer service among grants administrators: that they work for and with faculty, rather than as part of a stand-alone operation with only short-term accountability to faculty. Faculty would benefit from clearer direction from management at SSRI about who provides what services. The leadership of SSRI should continually work with faculty to help ensure that these objectives are being realized and should form a faculty oversight group that evaluates and develops solutions to problems as they arise.

#### **Based on these observations, we offer the following recommendations**

- Consistent with this report's emphasis on SSRI as the *incubator* for new collaborative research projects, the Committee recommends that SSRI focus more of its resources on helping nascent groups identify potential external funding sources and help them develop grant proposals to fund the research of these groups. This may include interactions with funding agencies or foundations, help with writing and budgeting proposals and coordinating proposal development, especially those involving teams of researchers, etc. We note that these services may be provided to Duke research groups, regardless of which units on campus end up administering the grants.
- As discussed in the Committee's recommendations concerning space, it is our sense that relocating SSRI's grants administration operation to West Campus will help improve its connections with faculty and their research projects.
- SSRI should not insist on or even prioritize being the only provider of grants administration services for social scientists, nor should the Provost's office encourage a system in which SSRI has a monopoly on grants management. If other arrangements are providing services that meet the PIs' needs, these arrangements should continue.
- SSRI should assess its ability to facilitate grants management so that faculty have reliable access to stable, highly experienced and competent staff, regardless of whether these staff are part of SSRI. In some instances faculty may not be well-served by any existing operation, in which case SSRI should identify solutions to access issues, recognizing that a "one size fits all" approach is unlikely to succeed and that SSRI's primary goal is to improve services.
- SSRI leadership should undertake a review of current staff competencies and degree of customer service orientation within SSRI, and consider seeking consulting input from managers of successful grants operations at other universities. Regardless of the degree to which SSRI provides grants services versus facilitates the work of other grants services groups, a significant "course correction" is in order with respect to viewing faculty as consumers whose opinions of SSRI's services matter. This goal may be facilitated by the move of key staff to a

west campus location.

- Substantial evidence suggests that in a world where grants administration has become increasingly complex, Duke Human Resources needs to considerably upgrade the staff assigned to grants management. The Committee hastens to add that this issue affects more than SSRI and it is our strong sense that it needs to be addressed more broadly within the social sciences. With respect to SSRI, we recommend that SSRI leadership and other grants-oriented groups in the social sciences at Duke, with the support of the Provost's office, work with Duke Human Resources to develop job descriptions, classifications and salary ranges for these positions so that new hires will have the skills and experience to be successful in dealing with the administration of the range of grants being submitted by and awarded to Duke's social science faculty. The Committee also recommends that SSRI leadership take a lead in continuing to insure that its grants staff and those of other social science units have access to continuing education and training courses needed to keep staff skills current.

## **D. Issues for SSRI to Consider in the Longer Term**

**O**ur recommendations for SSRI are focused on its next few years. This is done with purpose. SSRI will be acquiring a new Director who should have some latitude to affect the Institute during her/his tenure. More importantly, SSRI is a relatively young organization and its objectives and activities will and should evolve and not be constrained by a lengthy list of recommendations. Finally, SSRI's future will depend on whether the near term decisions it takes are successful and whether it can continue to garner funding from outside agencies, resources from the future leaders of Duke and, most importantly, the support and commitment of the Social Science faculty at Duke. Forecasting any one of these outcomes, let alone all of them, is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Thus, we have focused on the short run.

That said, the Committee did discuss some longer-run issues that we anticipate SSRI and its future leadership will need to address at some point down the road. Here we list some of these issues, although we avoid making any recommendations, or even suggestions, of how they should be resolved.

### **1. The balance between Centers and fostering new research projects**

To date, SSRI has focused on creating centers and now houses some seventeen centers and programs covering a variety of substantive and/or methodological domains. While we do not wish to second-guess this strategy, we do see a need for SSRI to become more entrepreneurial, focusing on smaller scale and more time-limited sets of activities that help to create "research startups." We think this focus on incubating new research projects that are interdisciplinary in nature and are sustained by the ideas developed of groups of faculty and students has the promise of innovation and advancing science in ways that may not always originate from any of the existing centers within SSRI.

Investing in this incubation of research and the other activities that we see as the foci of SSRI-West will challenge the financial resources and SSRI staff, especially in the short run. Thus, in the short run the Committee would suggest that SSRI be very reluctant to create or take on any additional Centers. In addition, the SSRI Leadership will need to develop a clear set of understandings with existing Centers as to who will do what and how Center-directed activities will be funded. The Committee notes that outgoing Director Phil Morgan and the current SSRI staff have already begun some of this delineation of service and funding responsibilities with Centers.

In the longer run, SSRI is going to need to determine what balance it wants and needs to strike between maintaining and supporting its Centers and devoting resources to fostering and incubating new research projects. That balance is not obvious at this juncture and it will likely depend on the relative success of its Centers and of the Institute's ability to foster innovation. SSRI will need to begin thinking about this issue soon, and, importantly, how to evaluate success, which is our second point.

### **2. SSRI will need to figure out ways to evaluate the success or failure of its activities and investments**

All of the research institutes we evaluated, to varying degrees, have to wrestle with the issue of how to evaluate the success or failure of their activities, from infrastructure programs to support for centers or the development of research projects and initiatives. At one extreme, organizations like Rand or the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan disproportionately judge success by the ability of activities to be supported by extramural funding. If projects can't garner funding from NIH, NSF or foundations, their viability is imperiled. Such a "soft money" orientation has its drawbacks. There are many research areas that

simply have very limited funding opportunities, regardless of the quality of research. Moreover, a soft money orientation can create perverse incentives for researchers. At the same time, the peer-review process that sustains research funders like NIH and NSF as well as many private foundations, is often a credible and impartial means of evaluating the merit of ideas and their broader importance and impact. In contrast, internal review processes can lack the critical and impartial nature that ensures that the best work is well supported and weaker research receives less.

SSRI and Duke need to ensure that investments in research are properly and critically evaluated. As noted in the Introduction, SSRI will undergo an external review in the next 3-5 years. Furthermore, SSRI has developed some measures of “interdisciplinarity” in its activities and the grants it manages and it reports these measures to the Provost’s office as part of its annual budgetary review. While both of these activities are useful, it is the Committee’s view that SSRI also will want to develop criteria, principles and procedures with which to evaluate its on-going educational and research activities beyond periodic external reviews or internal accounting-like measures. That said, Committee members were not unanimous in their views on how to structure this evaluation function. Some were more supportive of placing greater weight on the peer-review process of external funders. It is no accident that these researchers wished SSRI to do more to encourage and support extramural grant activities. Other members do not want SSRI to become a “soft money” grant shop in which extramural funding success is the primary criterion in resource allocation. Thus, we were not able to make any consensus recommendations on this issue. But, it is one that the SSRI leadership, in consultation with Duke’s administration and with the involvement of Duke faculty, will have to develop over the coming years.

### **3. How can SSRI ensure the support and commitment of Duke’s schools and departments?**

SSRI has been a unit that reports to the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies and its funding is provided by the Office of the Provost. There are sound reasons for this arrangement. It has helped to foster collaboration across departments and schools, which is especially important since the Social Sciences are not confined to disciplinary departments within Trinity College. It is not the Committee’s desire to second-guess this arrangement. Our conversations with previous SSRI Directors have indicated that SSRI always has received strong financial and moral support from the Provost’s Office.

At the same time, it is our sense that there has not always been “buy in” by the deans of the various schools on campus with presences in the Social Sciences. Moreover, the Social Science departments and their Chairs have varied in their degree of support for and cooperation with SSRI. While some of this lack of cooperation and involvement may result from rivalries and desires to protect turf, some is the product of the lack of faculty involvement in SSRI and its activities that the Committee noted earlier.

While we again do not wish to suggest we have enough information or adequate insight into this set of issues, the Committee does urge the new SSRI Director, the Vice-Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies and the deans of the relevant schools to consider ways of improving these relationships between SSRI and the schools and departments, including how these various units are involved in the governance of SSRI, and to consider whether it makes sense for these units to have some “skin” in the SSRI game on behalf of their Social Science faculty.

On this issue, the Committee is encouraged by the degree of involvement and cooperation between Vice Provost Susan Roth and Dean of the Social Sciences Angela O’Rand in convening our Committee and, more importantly, in the process of selecting the next Director of SSRI. In our view, such collaboration bodes well for the future of SSRI.