

**STRATEGIC PLAN, 2007-2012
POPULATION RESEARCH CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN**

May 22, 2007

Executive Summary

One of the nation's oldest centers of population research and training, the Population Research Center (PRC) at the University of Texas has undergone a resurgence in the population sciences over the past five years and is now poised to become a premier institution in the field. In the past five year period, the number of faculty members grew from 46 to 63, as did the interdisciplinary composition of the faculty, with increased participation by faculty in Geography, the LBJ School of Public Policy, and Economics. The PRC now has its largest grant portfolio with over \$27 million dollars in total federal grant support, of which \$23.5 million is from NIH. Five PRC faculty are ranked among the elite of the most highly cited social scientists, and these are the only social science faculty at UT garnering this honor. *U.S. News and World Report* (2006) recently ranked the Sociology of Population Program 5th nationally. All of these accomplishments were important contributing factors in the PRC's recently successful renewal of its NICHD R24 infrastructure grant, guaranteeing an impressive 8th round of NIH support.

At no time in the center's history is it more important to invest in its future given the PRC's impressive trajectory. The bedrock of our center is outstanding faculty. Not only is this the foundation for developing innovative interdisciplinary research in the population sciences, but it is the foundation for enhancing the scientific visibility of UT's social science departments and the recruitment of outstanding graduate students. To this end, the PRC proposes the following strategic aims to be implemented over the next five years for the center's continued development.

- **Reinvigorate UT's cluster hire commitment and recruit 10 population scientists for the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Human Ecology and Sociology.** Critical areas for recruitment are population health/biodemography, Latin American demography, and population and environment. It is vital that the PRC be seen nationally as central to the recruitment effort of population scientists across the core social science disciplines, as well as central to the development of nationally prominent trans-disciplinary initiatives.
- **Increase national prominence of funding activity among the PRC's faculty researchers targeting:**
 - Junior PRC faculty researchers' applications for career development awards so that at least 2 faculty in any single year are supported by these awards, e.g., W. T. Grant Foundation Career Awards and K01 NIH (mentored awards).
 - The development of two *signature* research projects. Signature research projects are interdisciplinary, collaborative, and large-scale. These projects are fundamentally important in defining scientific excellence and visibility in the center.
 - Secure NIH infrastructural funding for a Demography of Aging Center.
- **Increase gift funds for graduate student training and research support and endowed chairs**
 - Implement a funding initiative with a goal of \$15,000 per annum to supplement UT support for graduate training and research in the PRC. PRC faculty and alumni will be targeted for this effort.

- Work with COLA development to establish 2 endowed chairs to anchor the population sciences at UT. Potential research areas to target include biodemography and Latin American demography.
- **Improve the quality and quantity of space in the PRC.** The profound increase in the PRC's grant portfolio and its faculty and graduate students is now constraining the housing of new projects, faculty and students in the center, and is handcuffing opportunities to recruit nationally renowned faculty and outstanding graduate students, and developing new interdisciplinary initiatives. Ecological constraints on the Center's development are severe and must be remedied for the unit's trajectory to continue.
 - Work jointly with Sociology and the College of the Liberal Arts to plan and secure funding for a new building.

Rationale for Strategic Aims

AIM 1: Reinvigorate UT's cluster hire commitment and recruit 10 population scientists for the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Human Ecology and Sociology.

Nothing is more critical to the success of an academic research and training unit than recruiting and retaining outstanding faculty. Most of the recent recruitment in the population sciences at UT has occurred in Sociology. This has led to a number of excellent scientific outcomes – a group of outstanding faculty in population health, the emergence of a nationally prominent group working at the interface between demography and sociology of religion, and the recruitment of faculty whose interests in early life development align closely with the UT's Dell Center for the Advancement of Healthy Living. Similar possibilities exist for enhancing Economics, Anthropology, and Geography in Liberal Arts, and HDFS and Nutrition in the Natural Sciences. Although the outcomes are clearly contingent on the placement and success of investments in recruiting outstanding faculty, examples of new or elevated areas of scientific strength that could result (but are not limited to) include:

- *Population Health and Bio-Social Linkages.* Few social issues grab national attention more than population health. Is the health of Baby Boomers approaching retirement actually worse than prior birth cohorts? How have changes in medical technology altered how long people live and how they manage health problems? Why do Hispanics, despite high rates of poverty and low educational achievement, have lower than expected mortality? What are the biological “under the skin” pathways by which social and economic deprivation, fractious social relationships, and obesity heighten the risks of chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer? How do genetic risks and social conditions combine to influence problematic behaviors such as substance abuse and criminal activity, family behaviors such as commitment and parenting, and chronic health conditions? There exists significant potential for building on the already outstanding population health faculty in the PRC in ways that would directly link them to the biomedical sciences and UT's initiative in medical education. Especially important is the recruitment of faculty combining sophisticated training in both the population and biomedical sciences. Some of the nation's foremost biodemographers are being trained in physical anthropology. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Postdoctoral Fellowship program is also producing sociologists and economists with outstanding training in epidemiology and population genetics. Hiring faculty with these skills would offer new opportunities to develop nationally prominent interdisciplinary research and training programs.
- *Population Dynamics, Immigration, and Public Policy.* It is increasingly evident that population pressures are emerging that challenge basic social institutions and are the

foundations of fundamental social change. The rapid growth of Islamic populations and their migration to European nations underlies Europe's fears about future economic development, political stability and cultural identities. The streams of Latin American migrants into the United States foretell dramatic shifts in ethnic composition – European Americans will become a minority population in the decades ahead – and already are straining health care and educational resources. How these demographic shifts in the American population will impact political, cultural and social change is an important issue. Research seeking to understand these types of challenges necessarily draws on the population, social, and policy sciences to examine the population related causes and consequences of policy change. Significant potential exists for enhancing the scientific visibility of UT in this area, especially with an eye on Latin America and the Hispanic population. The PRC has a long-standing tradition of research excellence in Latin American and Border Demography, while the Latin American Studies Institute is one of the nation's most highly regarded interdisciplinary centers for education and research. Yet, a gradual winnowing of faculty of these areas through retirement and aggressive recruitment by other universities is threatening these institutional resources, and it is essential to send a signal nationally of UT's continued commitment toward scholarly prominence in this area.

- *Population and the Environment.* Globally, natural resources are under increasing pressure, threatening public health and development. Water shortages, soil exhaustion, de-forestation, air and water pollution, and degradation of coastlines afflict many areas. As the world's population grows, improving living standards and enhancing population health without destroying the environment are global challenges. Understanding these challenges necessitates the integration of the population, natural and spatial sciences to examine the interrelationships between ecological, climatological, technological, social and population change. Presently at UT, however, while there is outstanding scientific depth in the College of Natural Sciences and the Jackson School of Geological Sciences, research depth in the population sciences is lacking. Although there is a small core of excellent faculty in the Department of Geography, a critical mass of population science faculty who could actively contribute to this area is lacking. Given the outstanding faculty in the environmental sciences, strategic recruiting in the population sciences in this area is likely to pay significant dividends in developing large-scale interdisciplinary research and teaching initiatives.

The potential payoff to UT of additional faculty recruitment in these strategic, trans-disciplinary areas is tremendous. And, while departments must necessarily recruit and retain faculty, the PRC is a natural venue to develop and sustain highly innovative trans-disciplinary research and training initiatives in the social sciences. The PRC thus adds outstanding value to UT's social science departments, and is centrally important to the long-term development of outstanding social science departments at UT.

Aim 2: Increase national prominence of funding activity among the PRC's faculty

The PRC faculty rank among the most grant active researchers nationally in the population sciences. PRC junior faculty have had tremendous success in securing R03 funding from NIH, setting them on a trajectory to develop R01 applications. PRC senior faculty have a distinguished record of R01 funding. Nonetheless, the PRC falls short in two important ways that have implications for the center's national prominence.

The first shortfall is the lack of consistent "career development" funding for junior faculty. Despite their R03 success, PRC junior faculty have not taken full advantage of career development opportunities offered, for example, by the W. T. Grant Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health (K01). The importance of consistent

career development funding is essential to help bring junior faculty onto the national scientific stage quickly. It connects junior faculty to a larger network of scholars and it fosters interdisciplinary training. Faculty who have received these awards are typically poised to tackle large-scale interdisciplinary projects much earlier in their careers than is traditionally the case. A number of PRC faculty are excellent candidates for these awards including Shannon Cavanagh, Cynthia Osborne, Su Yeong Kim, Angel Harris, and Keith Robinson.

The second shortfall is related to the first. Although PRC faculty are highly adept at securing R01 funding, there is a dearth of *signature* projects that shape scientific development on a national or international scale. One type of signature project is the development of a major public good, such as a primary data collection study that would be used by a broad swath of population scientists nationally. An example of such a current signature project in the PRC is Chandra Muller's AHAA project, which is supported by NICHD, NSF and AERA. This study has garnered attention by sociologists, economists, and education policy researchers, and it is likely to be a major data resource for many researchers over the next decade. A second type of signature study is an NIH-supported P01 (program project). P01s typically pull together a series of R01 projects to gain leverage on complex interdisciplinary problems. The scientific visibility of P01s is enormous due to the high degree of innovation in such studies, the ability to define a set of scientific issues, as well as high levels of scientific publication in top tier outlets.

Two substantive areas within the PRC have the necessary faculty depth to tackle a signature project: faculty in the "education and transition to adulthood" area and the "population health" faculty. Both groups appear to be in nascent stages of developing projects, and these groups must be financially and logistically supported in their efforts. Over the next five years, the goal is to secure two signature projects – one for each area. A third possible area for investment is Latin American demography under the leadership of Joe Potter, but this will depend in part on whether faculty recruitment moves forward to build a critical mass of researchers in this area.

The PRC has seen substantial growth in the number of outstanding faculty working in the general area of the demography of aging (Jacqueline Angel, Ron Angel, Mark Hayward, Bob Hummer, Patrick Krueger, John Mirowsky, Catherine Ross, and Debra Umberson constitute the core faculty working in this area). UTMB has made serious overtures about pursuing joint research projects, especially in the area of Hispanic population health at the older ages, and they have excellent faculty in this area (e.g., Markides, Eschbach, Peek and Goodwin). With the probable upcoming competition for NIA-supported Demography of Aging centers, there has never been a better time to pursue developing a multi-university center with Hispanic aging as one of the center's core aims. Over the next year, investments will be made to support 1-2 small scale pilot projects as the means to jump start collaborative and center-like activities involving UT-Austin and UTMB.

Aim 3: Increase gift funds for graduate student training and research support and endowed chairs

Faculty recruitment investments must necessarily be reinforced with an infusion of infrastructural resources to develop and sustain trans-disciplinary research initiatives. No where is this more important than the ability to recruit and train outstanding graduate students. Such students are the basis for recruiting and retaining outstanding faculty, and they are fundamentally important, as research apprentices, in large-scale research, and they ultimately enhance the prestige of the university in their subsequent placements in top-tier research universities and with their scientific publication records.

Although UT's departments necessarily carry the bulk of the load in recruiting outstanding graduate students, partnership with the PRC is likely to yield greater success in recruitment. One of the ways that PRC can partner with departments is at the margins – partial funding for recruitment visits of top applicants and the availability of supplementary funds to support advanced training and research. Providing an institutional environment where graduate students see a commitment of resources to train the best and the brightest students is fundamentally important.

To this end, a goal of the PRC will be to institute a development effort to obtain gift funds for graduate student support. The primary target audience is our own 60+ faculty. If 60 faculty each gave \$25 per month, this would yield \$18,000 annually. In creating an organizational culture for faculty giving to support our graduate students, we need university support in implementing a “paycheck withholding” option permitting faculty to use pre-tax dollars for their contributions. As all of us look forward to the next capital campaign, making paycheck withholding a reality provides access to a largely untapped resource of support – our own faculty and staff.

An important means of ensuring long-term excellence and national prominence of the PRC's faculty is the ability to recruit and retain faculty with endowed chairs. Although endowed chairs often are department-specific or are based on general gift funds to the college, the PRC is an untapped resource on which to pursue private support of exciting and unique scholarship that could benefit all of the social science departments within COLA. With this idea in mind, our goal is to work with COLA's development leadership to establish 2 endowed chairs over the next 5 years to anchor the population sciences at UT. These chairs would be brokered, under the stewardship of the Dean of Liberal Arts, to departments seeking to recruit (and possibly to retain) nationally renowned senior faculty. Because the PRC and COLA would serve as the primary stewards of the endowed chairs in this area, the chairs could rotate across departments as they are vacated. This allows for flexibility in faculty investments as some research areas ebb while others emerge.

Aim 4: Improve the quality and quantity of space in the PRC

Because the PRC has experienced a profound increase in the past five years in its grant portfolio and its faculty and graduate students, the Center has reached its limits in housing additional projects, faculty and students in the UT Tower. In addition, on a national basis, the quality of the PRC's facilities ranks at the very bottom of outstanding population research centers. This situation is handcuffing opportunities to recruit nationally renowned faculty and outstanding graduate students, and in developing new interdisciplinary initiatives. Ecological constraints on the Center's development are severe and must be remedied for the unit's trajectory as one of the top population research programs to continue and to avoid dropping in the rankings. Other major universities such as Michigan, Brown, Princeton, and Minnesota have made enormous investments in housing their population centers, and the PRC's abysmal quality and quantity of space relative to our major competitors is clear and consistently worsening.

The PRC's goal over the next 5 years is to relocate the center in first-class space. Co-locating the center with the Department of Sociology is strongly preferred since many Sociology faculty and graduate students are currently housed in the PRC and ecologically absent in the day-to-day interactions of departmental life. This is not a healthy situation either for Sociology or the PRC in terms of healthy scholarly community development and relationships. The PRC will

work with COLA and the Department of Sociology to develop a space solution that not only responds to these units' immediate needs but also allows for future growth in these units.