

WAYNE STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
DIVISION OF RESEARCH



MERRILL PALMER SKILLMAN INSTITUTE  
*for Child & Family Development*

2017 - 2022 Strategic Plan



## **Introduction**

Since the creation of our 2011–2015 strategic plan, we have accomplished many important objectives. For the first time since the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute (MPSI) became part of Wayne State University, annual research funding topped more than \$2 million, and did so for three years in a row. We have invested in faculty labs and are a vital resource for mentoring and financial support for lab renovation and preliminary studies. We continue to grow as an Institute, and now have 10 full-time faculty with primary appointments in MPSI. We have strengthened our focus on infant mental health and early childhood education, created the nation's first dual-title Infant Mental Health degree program, and increased our Infant Mental Health faculty to three individuals. Concurrently, we launched the Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Education Consortium to provide leadership in Early Childhood Education throughout Metropolitan Detroit. Our community engagement efforts reach more than 2,400 individuals each year, and are integrated into our community-based research efforts. Finally, our research training programs have matured: We now train 8-12 predoctoral students annually, and for each of the past three years we have involved more than 50 undergraduates in research.

Today, MPSI is recognized as a leader at Wayne State University in both child development research and meaningful connection with the community. MPSI continues to expand its efforts to address the changing conditions and pressures of modern society on urban families and children of all ages, and to play a key role in promoting collaborative, interdisciplinary research across Wayne State University.

The five-year strategic plan outlined here will guide us in fulfilling our mission.

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## **Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child and Family Development**

In 2020, the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child and Family Development (MPSI) will have been a vital part of Michigan's academic landscape and an integral member of the greater Detroit community for 100 years. Founded in 1920 as the Merrill-Palmer School, early enterprises included formal academic training programs and research in child development—a discipline then in its infancy—as well as services to school systems, professionals, and families. MPSI grew and adapted along with Detroit, striving to be responsive to the changing needs of children and families through cycles of industrialization, population shifts, social currents, and economic turns. MPSI has trained generations of scholars, researchers, and professionals; been intimately involved with the community as a neighbor; and served children and their parents and caregivers, all while conducting pioneering research with national impact.

### **The Mission**

Through knowledge discovery, education, and community engagement, MPSI promotes the development, health, and well-being of infants, children, youth, and their families, particularly in Detroit.

### **2020 Vision**

As MPSI prepares to enter its second century, we are committed to leadership, innovation and excellence in scholarship, and training and community involvement across Wayne State University, Detroit, Southeastern Michigan, and the nation. We will remain responsive to rapidly emerging social, biological, environmental, and other challenges and opportunities faced by urban families and children of all ages. We will nurture collaboration and creativity in integrative, transdisciplinary scholarly inquiry and knowledge translation, capitalize on our combined academic strengths, and foster community partnerships within Detroit for mutual benefit. We will provide outstanding training opportunities to diverse undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in programs that are seamlessly integrated with our research and community outreach activities to prepare the next generation of leaders in child and family development.

## Strategic Direction #1

### Research Excellence

Research at MPSI will continue to focus on urban populations at increased risk due to community, environmental, biomedical, psychosocial, and other challenges; translate research into policies and practices that improve the lives of urban children and families; and promote interdisciplinary research in developmental sciences across Wayne State University that connects schools, departments, disciplines, and individuals. MPSI is committed to more than simply participating in this research; we seek excellence, collectively and individually. We have three goals in this regard.

Goals for 2017-2022: MPSI faculty will serve as research leaders and meet or exceed productivity guidelines. Specifically, faculty will act as PIs on one investigator-initiated, multiyear extramural grant; play a major role on an additional extramural grant; average at least three peer-reviewed research publications per year; and contribute to the national research community by serving on a journal editorial board and/or as a reviewer of manuscripts and research grant applications.

#### *Objectives*

1. Provide unparalleled support for faculty in meeting this goal.
  - Provide grant-writing consultation at all levels (from broad concept to wordsmithing) via external consultants.
  - Arrange for external grant reviews to supplement those provided by the OVPR, including review of early-stage documents (e.g., Specific Aims).
  - Provide on-call statistical consultation and facilitate pre-award statistical consultation via the Clinical Research Services Center.
  - Provide training in Qualtrics survey software.
  - Engage faculty in discussion of other resources that might be valuable.
2. Establish an internal grant review process to increase the success rate of MPSI grant applications.
  - Create an internal grant review process consistent with any applicable OVPR guidelines (in order to be eligible for OVPR financial support) in which an investigator submits a Specific Aims page, one-page Approach section, potential funding source, and list of collaborators to colleagues one week prior to a scheduled internal review.
  - Schedule standing internal review meetings in which MPSI faculty and invited guests with relevant expertise review the draft proposal for approximately 30 minutes. The applicant will then be invited into the meeting, during which a spokesperson will present the results of the discussion and answer questions.

## Strategic Direction #2

### Strengthen the Predoctoral Training Program

MPSI offers an integrated, interdisciplinary, community team-science training program for select predoctoral students that is designed to complement disciplinary-based preparation and provide students with additional skills for research-related careers in academia or other professional settings. Since 2010, almost 30 doctoral students have participated in the program; of the eight who earned the Ph.D., six are either university faculty or postdoctoral trainees. Currently, nine fellows and four trainees are active in the program. This training opportunity brings together and funds students who have interests in infant, child, or adolescent development, especially within a family or community context. The program provides intensive research mentorship, exposure to interdisciplinary and community perspectives, conference participation, professional development seminars, membership in the Graduate Student Organization, a MPSI Colloquia Speaker Series, and interaction with national and international visitors to the Institute.

Goals for 2017–2022: MPSI will continue to offer a predoctoral training program that provides trainees with additional opportunities to develop research, academic, professional, and community-outreach skills that extend beyond those obtained in their home departments.

#### *Objectives*

1. Increase visibility of and participation in the MPSI predoctoral training program.
  - Explore targets for number and disciplinary areas of students recruited.
  - Work more closely with department leaders to highlight MPSI in their recruitment efforts.
  - Continue to increase the diversity of student fellows and trainees.
  - Broaden communication concerning student achievements.
2. Articulate and evaluate training program competencies.
  - Establish program competencies related to interdisciplinary research, team science, community-engaged research, and other research skills.
  - Identify MPSI-wide laboratory- and community-based training opportunities that support predoctoral training competencies.
  - Develop an assessment plan.
3. Enhance program infrastructure.
  - Strengthen the MPSI Individualized Development Plan (IDP) process so that program competencies are achieved by goals and objectives included in the IDP.
  - Align professional development offerings with program competencies.
  - Document and create shared access to program processes and practices.
  - Work with students to develop the Graduate Student Organization in ways that support attaining program competencies.

## Strategic Direction #3

### Enhance Community Impact

Community engagement, translational research, and community team-science approaches to training maximize the community impact of MPSI's work. During our most recent strategic plan, we were engaged in expanding each of these programs; now we aim to maximize our community impact through the intersection of research, engagement, and training. Bidirectional communication between research participants, community members, and MPSI faculty, staff, and trainees allows for deeper partnerships and more effective implementation of translational projects. In this Strategic Direction, we will specify the goals and objectives for MPSI's community engagement efforts.

Goals for 2017–2022: MPSI will continue to honor its commitment to address the needs of children and families in the community and enhance community outreach and professional education.

#### *Objectives*

1. Increase integration across MPSI community-related programs by:
  - Increasing infant/IMH training content in Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium (WCECC) programming.
  - Offering Hearts and Minds on Babies to WCECC centers.
  - Standardizing program development forms and tracking evaluations.
  - Incorporating parent training into the work of the WCECC.
2. Enhance bidirectional communication with community partners by:
  - Broadening the Healthier Urban Families (HUF) advisory board to establish an MPSI community advisory board.
  - Inviting community partners to colloquia.
  - Highlighting the work of select community partners in Imprints.
  - Expanding community partnerships through the Co-Registry.
  - Developing a web page for our community advisory board members.
3. Continue to offer high-quality professional development and family educational programs branded by MPSI, including:
  - Explorations in Development.
  - Take a Giant Step Teen Conference.
  - Hearts and Minds on Babies.
  - Annual consortium training.
  - Web-based training (to be created).
4. Integrate MPSI training program members into community-related programs by:
  - Allowing MPSI Fellows to attend community trainings.
  - Including a MPSI Fellow on the Giant Step Steering Committee.
  - Including a MPSI Fellow on the MPSI community advisory board.
  - Sponsoring at least one colloquium per year focusing on a community-based research partnership.

## Strategic Direction #4

### Enhance Infant Mental Health Research

MPSI has a long history of offering advanced training in infant mental health (IMH). The IMH program is committed to advancing the field by conducting clinically relevant research, supporting trainees to become strong clinicians and researchers, and providing professional development training and consultation to community agencies.

Goals for 2017–2022: Infant mental health faculty will continue to advance the field through research and by training students and community members.

#### *Objectives*

1. IMH faculty affiliated with MPSI will conduct research programs that establish MPSI as a national leader in the area of IMH research and training.
  - Faculty will pursue and work collaboratively to attain extramural grant funding for research that furthers the field of IMH.
  - Faculty will publish peer-reviewed research in the area of IMF, consistent with MPSI standards.
  - Faculty and staff will publish papers related to program development and clinical training in IMH.
  - IMH faculty will increase trainee interest in clinically informed IMH research by mentoring graduate and undergraduate students in developmental research.
2. MPSI will continue to offer a research- and clinically intensive curriculum to IMH Dual-Title (IMH-DT) trainees.
  - Provide a science-based and clinically informed curriculum that balances IMH theory, history, and research.
  - Based on trainee performance and feedback, continue to refine key assignments that target a developmental progression of skill building across the training experience.
  - Continue to take advantage of innovative technology to effectively employ class time to build reflective skills and provide hands-on clinical learning.
  - Continue to integrate emerging research into lectures and readings.
  - Offer a high-quality seminar experience that is consistent with standards advanced by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health.
  - Measure IMH trainee learning outcomes.
  - Use rubrics developed for key assignments and the Developmental Indicators of Clinical Competence to document the effectiveness of the curriculum.
  - Develop a series of assignments that document the developmental progression of trainees' reflective skills.
  - Continue to work collaboratively with field supervisors to enhance trainee clinical experiences in the field and in the classroom by producing quarterly newsletters, convening meetings each semester, and conducting orientations.



3. IMH faculty and staff will continue to act as leaders in IMH training and consultation in the Detroit metropolitan community through outreach, engagement, and collaboration with our community partners.
  - With HUF, the IMH program will sponsor the annual two-day Explorations in Development Conference for at least 60 participants.
  - IMH faculty and staff will conduct trainings for parent and professional audiences.
  - IMH faculty and staff will collaborate with community agencies to evaluate programs.
  - IMH-DT trainees will engage with the community through their clinical practice.
  - IMH faculty and staff will serve on community advisory boards.
  - IMH faculty and staff will provide reflective supervision and consultation for early childhood programs.
  - IMH faculty and staff will join with IMH clinical supervisors and agency administrators to deliver pre-service training.
  
4. Contribute to MPSI's training mission by increasing doctoral student enrollment in the IMH-DT program.
  - Collaborate with departments that have adopted the IMH-DT to incorporate IMH-DT recruitment into existing recruitment mechanisms.
  - Ensure that the IMH-DT program is included on department websites.
  - Work with IMH faculty liaisons in departments to ensure that IMH-DT is represented at information sessions and in student handbooks for new doctoral students.
  - Continue to participate in WSU's graduate open house.

## Strategic Direction #5

### **Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Early Childhood Center**

Since the last strategic plan, MPSI has: (a) established a financial foundation for the ECC through grants, increased enrollment in the tuition program, and donations; (b) secured full accreditation for the ECC from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2011); (c) strengthened its collaboration with the College of Education Early Childhood Center to ensure the quality of programs for young children and their families; and (d) established community partnerships (e.g., Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium, Detroit Institute of Arts, etc.).

Goal for 2017–2022: The Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Early Childhood Center will continue to provide a high-quality preschool program for young children and their families.

#### *Objectives*

- Maintain accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2016–2021).
- Begin reaccreditation process in 2020 and submit application to the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Maintain Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) status and renew as required every two years.
- Continue to provide professional development opportunities for the staff to promote best practices in early childhood education.
- Serve as a demonstration site for students from the university and for the metro Detroit community.
- Continue collaboration with the College of Education Early Childhood Center to ensure alignment of the two programs.

### **Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium (WCECC)**

The Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium, which was formed in 2011, is a collaborative effort by directors and staff from early childhood centers, Wayne State University faculty from the College of Education and the MPSI, and representatives from community partners. The goals of the Early Childhood Consortium are to expand and improve: (a) the professional development of early childhood center directors, teachers, and support staff; (b) implementation of best practices in early childhood education in Detroit; (c) parent engagement and education programs; and (d) collaborative relationships among Consortium members and community partners. The Consortium is supported by the Kresge and PNC Foundations, which have funded the Consortium's work since its inception.

Goals for 2017–2022: The Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, in collaboration with the College of Education, will continue the work of the WCECC and expand the Consortium model into a new neighbor in Detroit.

1. Continue the work of the WCECC by:

- Convening monthly meetings.
- Delivering professional development for center directors, teachers, staff, and community partners.
- Providing a coaching/mentoring program for center directors.
- Supporting participation in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to promote implementation of best practices.

2. Adapt the WCECC model to develop a planning process playbook for creating new early childhood center neighborhood consortia in Detroit and other urban communities, with an emphasis on directed networking, center-need coaching and professional development, parent engagement, community partner-provider connections, and a whole-child systems perspective.

## Strategic Direction #6:

### **Enhance Financial Stability through Fund Raising and Development**

By revitalizing the MPSI Board of Visitors, expanding activities related to the Freer House, and focusing on grants and individual donations, MPSI has increased its fund-raising success since the end of Wayne State University's first Capital Campaign in 2008. Since the Pivotal Moments Campaign began eight years ago, MPSI has reached almost 70% of its goal and received \$3 million in new funds (not counting the more than \$1 million from the Skillman Foundation endowment account at MPSI).

Goal for 2017–2022: MPSI will secure \$350,000 or more per year in foundation, corporate, and private contributions to support MPSI research, training, and engagement activities.

#### *Objectives*

1. Maximize opportunities for fund-development success by:
  - Funding a half-time development officer (for either individual gifts or corporate/foundation relations).
  - Appointing new members to the MPSI Board of Visitors.
  - Holding four BOV meetings per year with at least 70% participation at each meeting.
  - Continuing to publish the Imprints newsletter and a biannual MPSI report.
  - Soliciting increased media attention for significant MPSI news and achievements.
  - Increasing the priority of giving to the Freer House.

## Strategic Direction #7:

### Freer House

Over the last five years, significant progress has been made in sustaining and surpassing the goals for the Freer House. A full-time director and full-time administrative assistant have been hired to support Freer House projects. More than 300 members have been recruited as Friends of the Freer House, and each year at least three events have been held that attract large, diverse audiences and partner groups. In addition, progress has been made toward ascertaining the feasibility of restoring the Whistler Gallery to its original grandeur for future use as a community meeting space. Specifically, an initial design was commissioned and HVAC units have been altered, which positions the room for restoration.

Goals for 2017–2022: Enhance the restoration, revitalization, and public awareness of the Freer House.

#### *Objectives*

1. Freer House maintenance and restoration.
  - Successful completion of the Garden Project.
  - Identifying and prioritizing the next major projects, such as the Visitors Center and Whistler Gallery.
  - Development of a plan to replace seriously deteriorated wood façade shingles and rotted window casements. This will be a major capital project requiring Board of Governors/WSU support, similar to the roof and HVAC projects.
  - Establishing a process for collaborative working relationships and communication with Facilities and Plant Management and the Office of VP for Finance and Business Operations to effectively support restoration and maintenance projects, from design to implementation.
2. Fundraising support for major capital improvements, programs, and operations.
  - Develop a higher profile within fund-raising outreach at WSU and obtain increased support from Development and the WSU Foundation to leverage corporate, foundation, and major individual contributions.
  - Explore establishment of an endowment for building maintenance and restoration.
3. Enhance relations with the leaders/occupants of Tierney House.
  - Establish relationships through regular meetings with the leadership of Development and Alumni Relations regarding common goals for preservation, maintenance, restoration, public education, and access for both the Freer and Tierney Houses.
  - Establish, at minimum, an annual gathering of both buildings' occupants—MPSI, IOG, Alumni Affairs, and the HIGH Program—to share information on the history, care, and preservation of both houses and strengthen bonds for professional interaction and socializing.
4. Celebrate the centennials of Freer's death (2019), acquisition of the Freer House by the Merrill Palmer School (2020), and the opening of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (2022).

continued

- Coordinate and interweave 100th anniversary promotions and events related to Freer, MPSI, and the Freer Gallery to strengthen awareness of the richly layered history of the Freer House and encourage support for its preservation.

5. Freer House Operations, Membership and Programs.

- Increase the membership and donor bases for operational support.
- Continue to receive funding support from the Americana, Kresge, and Erb Foundations.
- Cultivate existing and new institutional and community partners to help share the costs of and increase outreach for programs and events.
- Continue to sponsor creative and informative lectures and public education programs that engage diverse audiences and communities.
- Rebuild and strengthen the Freer House board with new representation from community partners, institutions, businesses, and WSU while retaining effective and committed board members.

6. Research and documentation to showcase and preserve Dr. Thomas Brunk's scholarship on Freer and the Freer House.

- Gain the confidence and support of Dr. Brunk for the care and preservation of his storehouse of Freer-related documentation and objects
- Archive, in databases and other forms of archival preservation, Dr. Brunk's Freer-related records and objects in a repository at the DIA and Freer House.
- Consider naming the future visitors center, or the Freer House research and operations offices, in honor of Dr. Brunk and creating a related fundraising campaign to support continued student and faculty research related to Freer's legacy and Freer House history.

Strategic Direction #8:

**Centennial Celebration**

In May 2020, the MPSI will mark its 100th anniversary. This milestone provides an opportunity to celebrate the Institute's history and accomplishments and increase the visibility of its research, outreach, and training programs across diverse audiences.

Goals for 2017–2022: To organize and host the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute Centennial Celebration.

*Objectives*

1. Attain greater visibility among developmental scientists for MPSI research nationally and internationally.
  - Host and promote a symposium on topic(s) related to MPSI research and highlight MPSI's historical contributions.
  - Explore publishing an edited book or monograph on the symposium with WSU Press and/or mounting an exhibit with the Reuther Library Archives.
2. Enhance partnerships with the metro Detroit and Wayne State University communities by highlighting the outcomes of and applications for MPSI translational research and community-team science.
  - Host and promote a series of colloquia leading up to the May celebration that would address key historical highlights of MPSI research topic areas.
  - Include local and national speakers.
  - Present an award to key local change agents in child and family development.
3. Raise funds for projects related to centennial themes.
  - Engage MPSI and ECC alumni.
  - Expand MPSI donor base.
  - Continue communications and fund raising after the Centennial Celebration.



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