THE LIFE COURSE AND HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER

2000-2001 ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND PLANNING REPORT

A. MISSION AND AREAS OF FOCUS

This Center devotes its attention to multi-cultural research on potentially modifiable factors of relevance to psychological distress and disorder, substance abuse and dependence, and deviant behavior. The center takes a life course perspective in assessing stage of life variations in the role and significance of social statuses, processes, and experiences. Our central objective is to contribute to prevention science by identifying risk and protective factors, and variations in such factors across gender, race/ethnicity, and age, that represent promising targets for prevention or intervention efforts. Consistent with this objective, our research is community-epidemiologic in nature, involving large-scale investigations of representative community samples. An important dimension of analysis involves evaluations of the role of stress exposure in the occurrence of mental health, substance and deviance problems and consideration of factors that moderate or mediate the impact of such exposure.

The Center currently pursues its mission through the conduct of two large scale studies, both funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Theses studies are referred to as the “Transitions Study” (Drug Use Trajectories: Ethnic/Racial Contrasts) and the “Disability Study” (Physical Disability, Mental Health and Drug Abuse). The first of these involves a large sample of young persons in the transition to adulthood, while the second spans ages 18-90. These studies overlap significantly in the measures used and in both the outcomes addressed and the risk and protective factors being assessed. Because they are at different stages (Transitions is in the initial data analytic stage while Disability is in the instrument development and sampling preparatory stages) they provide a particularly rich context for furthering the development of graduate students and young professional faculty and staff.

In addition to the advantages of scale and sharing of experience and staff across these two studies, the center provides a much enriched opportunity to foster and encourage the development of additional grant applications to support studies also directed toward our stated mission. At the same time data are made available for doctoral dissertations along with rather unique training and experience in culturally appropriate and competent measurement across ethnic lines and across differing Spanish speaking sub-cultures. We believe the Center is quickly becoming an exceptional source of cutting edge training and of significant scientific advances with respect to substance use and mental health problems.

B. ORGANIZATION, EXTERNAL TRENDS AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Organizational Issues
   See attached organizational chart.

2. Advisory Board Members
   This Center has been in existence for a relatively short period of time. An advisor board is intended and we are in the process of forming such a board.
3. External Trends
   At present, we are not aware of any external trends that are likely to threaten our
capacity to pursue the mission we have set forth.

4. Strategic Directions and Areas of Emphasis
   We expect to become known as a leading center of research on ethnic variations in the
role and significance of risk and protective factors with respect to deviance, drug and
alcohol problems, psychological distress and psychiatric disorder. Our work will be
notable for being set within a life course perspective and for its devotion to culturally
competence measurement.

C. 2000-2001 ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goal 1: To stay within the established parameters of the data collection timelines for each of our two current
studies and begin the data analysis portion of the Transitions study.
Assessment Criteria (Measurable Outcome): The amount of interviews conducted should fall within
projections Accomplishment: The amount of interviews for the Disability study has proceeded apace, however
finishing the last of the Transitions study interviews has been complicated by an increasing refusal on the part
of the participants. Consequently, the timetable has been adjusted to correspond to this trend.
Use of Results for Program Improvement: The possibility for increasing number of participant refusals in the
late part of the study has been incorporated into planning for future studies.

Goal 2: Begin the data analysis portion of the Transitions Study
Assessment Criteria (Measurable Outcome): There should be an increase in the production of scholarly
papers.
Accomplishment: Over a dozen scholarly papers have already been completed as of 9/21/2001, and several
others are in the process of being completed.
Use of Results for Program Improvement: N/A

D. 2001-2002 ANNUAL GOALS

2001-2002 Goal 1: To stay within the timetable for the Disability Study and the revised timetable for the
completion of the Transitions study
Measurable Outcome: The completion of data gathering for the Transitions study and the accomplishment of
approximately 900 interviews for the Disability Study

2001-2002 Goal 2: To begin planning for the Disability Wave 2 study and begin hiring relevant personnel.
Measurable Outcome: The completion of the study instruments for the Disability Wave 2 study, and the hiring
of key administrative and research personnel in preparation of data collection the following year.

E. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Major Activities - Prior Year

   During the prior year, we continued the data collection phase of the wave 2 portion of the study. This
involved continued interviewing activities as well as revision of our initial time table. Due to the
increasing number of refusals from study participants entering the late period of data collection, we
needed to refocus our efforts on tracking methods that had proved effective in the past. In particular,
the value of the Autotrack tracking system from ChoicePoint Public records has proved invaluable in
locating previously unreachable participants. Furthermore, our interviewers have been refocused on
their attempts to successfully contact and solicit interviews from those participants whose whereabouts are known. A stronger emphasis has been placed on conversion of refusals and accommodating participants’ needs. An incentive program was also instituted for the Transitions Study where all participants being interviewed on any given month will stand the chance to win a gift certificate from Best Buy in a random drawing. We have also doubled the amount of the participant payments from $25 to $50 in cases where it is necessary. Such cases have increased dramatically.

We have also begun the data analysis portion of the study in earnest. Although some scholarly papers based on Wave 1 data had already been produced and submitted, the number of such papers has dramatically increased this year. Counting papers in print and presented at conferences, over a dozen scholarly papers based on the Transitions Study data have been completed as of 9/21/2001, with several others in the works. By the end of this year, we hope to have produced over two dozen papers, which is on par with some of the most prestigious research centers nationwide.

At the beginning of this year, we also began work on the data collection phase of the Disability Study. We had to begin with the requisite training of study interviewers. In this endeavor we had the aid of some of our most experienced interviewers who were able to share from their hands on experience. We were fortunate to have a large pool of screeners to chose from who had demonstrated competence in specific areas that would be needed for interviewing. Once training was complete, we finalized the study instrument through the use of pilot interviews, which were also used to help finalize the skills of the interviewers. From that point on, data collection settled into a stable pattern. We have been staying within our timetable for interviewing and hope to have the study completed within the parameters set out in our revised timeline (revised due to cuts in the initial budget).

We also completed an application for a second grant to continue with a second wave for the Disability Study. Completion of this grant application was extremely time consuming and required the effort of the Director, our graduate assistants, our senior researchers, and members of our administrative staff. The completed application with all copies included was composed of the equivalent of approximately 8 reams of paper. The application itself had to be carefully completed to ensure its accuracy and had to be checked and rechecked by many different parties including the Dean’s office and the office of Sponsored Research and Training.

2. Major Activities - Coming Year

During the coming year, we plan to complete the data collection phase of the Transitions Study, probably within the first months of 2002. We will continue with the data analysis phase of the study, and plan to produce several more scholarly papers based on the data collected. Data analysis will continue for at least a year after the data collection is completed, and probably longer. This will mean an increase in production of scholarly papers even beyond the high level we achieved he prior year. This will also mean a dramatic increase in travel to conferences to present papers, and an increase in production costs as we endeavor to prepare presentation materials.

We wish to complete, or bring near completion, the data collection phase of the Disability study. This will mean the continuation of the interviewing process within the currently established timetable. Completion of the data collection will be aided by the infusion of new interviewers who will be reassigned from the Transitions Study once data collection for that study is complete. If the data
collection can be completed ahead of schedule, we will begin with the data analysis portion of the Disability study, perhaps even producing some scholarly papers from the collected data.

We wish to be successful in our application for a new grant to conduct a second wave of interviews for the Disability study. If our application is accepted, we will need to prepare new study literature, revise and further refine the study instrument for the second wave, and prepare to program the instrument into all available laptop computers. We will also need to hire new administrative staff and new interviewers, which will have to be recruited from outside. We expect that it will take us several months before we are able to have the second wave of the study up and running. Our goal is to begin wave two interviews approximately two years from the time the first wave of interviews started.