

Institute for Society, Culture and Environment

www.isce.vt.edu/

Karen A. Roberto

Professor of adult development and aging, Director of the Center for Gerontology, and Director of the Institute for Society, Culture and Environment

MISSION STATEMENT

The Institute for Society, Culture and Environment is tasked with strengthening the university's competitive position in the social sciences, humanities, and the arts. The institute provides organizational, technical, and financial support for targeted creative, interactive, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary research endeavors that address issues of social and individual transformation.

Goals and Objectives Achieved for FY 2011

Expand investment and leadership in the areas of social and behavioral health.

Goal Accomplishment: Institute-supported faculty members working in the area of social, behavioral, and public health are directing new externally-funded research projects.

- Megan Dolbin-MacNab is principal investigator for a two-year project, supported by a \$253,984 grant from the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Food Programs, to discover ways that the Virginia Department of Health's Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Community Nutrition Services can better serve needy infants and children under 5 being raised by grandparents.
- Karen Roberto is directing activities in Virginia for a five-state regional research, outreach, and training program to reduce cancer health disparities in rural Appalachia that is supported by a \$6.5 million five-year grant from the National Cancer Institute. A primary focus of the program is the development, implementation, and evaluation of a faith-based intervention to reduce obesity and increase physical activity.

- Susan Marmagas, Kerry Redican, and Karen Roberto developed a health systems profile for Carilion Franklin Memorial Hospital in Rocky Mount, Va. Their research was supported by a \$24,000 grant from the Carilion Foundation.
- Two faculty groups, Jeffrey R. Alwang and Bradford F. Mills, and Laura S. Jensen and Fatima Sharif, received a \$38,000 contract from the Virginia Department of Health Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy to conduct rural health equity analyses and cancer risk perceptions research, respectively.

Enhance collaborations with the university's growing health and life sciences programs.

Goal Accomplishment: Centers and faculty members associated with the institute are pursuing new opportunities to develop innovative health and health services research.

- Isabel Bradburn is leading a two-year \$40,000 National Institutes of Health funded project to establish interdisciplinary research and proposal development teams, which include more than 20 Virginia Tech faculty members from the social and behavioral sciences, life sciences, and engineering sciences, to address intergenerational obesity.

- Through the Summer Scholars Program, the institute is supporting several collaborative partnerships between faculty members from a variety of disciplines to conduct preliminary investigations that will initiate a larger line of research on human health, including the study of genetics on sense of mastery and alcohol-related outcomes, factors contributing to the under-diagnosis of breast cancer in rural southwest Virginia, and the neurophysiological underpinnings of social and behavioral challenges in autism spectrum disorders.
- The institute finalized an agreement with the Virginia Tech public health program to assume leadership for the Center for Public Health Practice and Research (formerly the Institute of Community Health).

Strengthen faculty collaborations in the National Capital Region.

Goal Accomplishment: Several faculty members located in the National Capital Region are pursuing research and scholarship under the auspices of the institute.

- The new book, “WTO Disciplines on Agricultural Support: Seeking a

Fair Basis for Trade” (Cambridge University Press, 2011), edited by David Orden, director of the institute’s Global Issues Initiative, and colleagues David Blandford and Tim Josling, has received accolades from distinguished scholars and policy leaders world-wide.

- Derek Hyra is conducting one of the first studies to investigate the processes associated with and the meaning of multiracial gentrification, where upper- and middle-income whites, blacks, and Hispanics, both gay and heterosexual, move into a low-income black neighborhood in Washington, D.C.
- The institute is supporting a partnership between three members of Virginia Tech’s Center for Public Administration and Policy (Matthew Dull, Beth Offenbacher, and Saunji Fyffe), the City of Alexandria, and two local nonprofit organizations. Building on a multi-year Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria and the city’s strategic plan, the initiative will engage community members in dialog about quality-of-life and well-being indicators.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR FY 2012

Enhance support for interdisciplinary collaborations, particularly in the area of social, behavioral, and public health.

Expand investment and leadership in the area of social complexity and individual risk.

Promote opportunities among the faculty to develop international collaborations.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The institute provides a forum for both relatively inexperienced and very seasoned faculty to form collaborations in preparation for seeking external funds to advance their research and scholarship. Addressing contemporary social issues, the disciplinary knowledge and methodological skills of faculty members affiliated with the institute often complement the work of Virginia Tech’s other research institutes and faculty by integrating the human element into technology and science-based research and practice. The challenge remains to more fully develop specific content areas as well as proposal writing capacity and strengthen connections among faculty members across the university in order for individuals and groups to mobilize quickly and take advantage of external funding opportunities.