Summary Report of the Social Science Planning Group

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A social sciences Planning Group was appointed by the Provost and charged with soliciting, identifying and evaluating potential interdisciplinary and university-wide initiatives, and then making recommendations on what investments were worth making in order to strengthen the social sciences across disciplines and schools at Duke. The assumption behind the initiative was that schools and departments generally request and allocate resources through departmental channels, whereas cross-cutting interdisciplinary projects do not have easy access to resources. This initiative was, in part, an attempt to rectify that situation.

The Planning Group’s 16 members solicited and reviewed 22 proposals over the course of the Fall ’99 and Spring’00 semesters. These were discussed at considerable length, examined in the context of criteria that we developed (e.g., quality of faculty, synergies among departments), divided into various categories (e.g., level of request, nature of request), returned to the proposers for further elaboration, and reviewed by our committee as well as by the academic priorities committee, which refined and stressed certain of our priorities: the proposals should address important societal and scientific problems; they should tie in with existing initiatives; they should involve excellent faculty; the collaboration proposed should have a greater impact than the sum of the parts; and, to the extent possible, they should be self sustaining (through external funding).

Ultimately, the committee recommended five major proposals to the Academic Priorities Committee for funding as social science initiatives, and five lesser proposals to the Common Fund for more modest funding. Of the first five, three were funded, one was rejected and another was significantly reduced and referred to the Common Fund. Of the second group (the referred proposal made the total six), the Common Fund funded four.

Over the course of the summer, the three major initiatives (the Center for Environmental Solutions, Research Development in Child and Health Policy, and the Micro-Incentives Research Center) were further developed, and in the fall they were approved by the Provost for initial funding. These initiatives are discussed in brief in Part 3 of the Strategic Plan.