The Northern Institute acts as a catalyst to build capacity in social research and policy research that impacts on people’s lives and aspires to an inclusive, sustainable future for people in northern Australia and the neighbouring region.

RESEARCH CAPABILITY STATEMENT 2012

1. DEMOGRAPHICS AND GROWTH PLANNING

Understanding population systems and trends found in the Northern Territory regional and remote areas and being able to make decisions about the impact on economic and social wellbeing.

Principal Scientist:

Professor Dean Carson

Key areas of work:

- Formal demographic analysis and modelling for small and relatively isolated populations (including cohort component and agent-based modelling).
- Developing innovative techniques for understanding and representing demographic impacts from policies impacting on ‘the north’.
- Understanding and mapping impacts from population flows, mobilities and migrations in the Northern Territory.
- Assessing the demographic and social impacts from non-resident workers and visitors across the north and in remote areas in general.
- The changing demographics of Indigenous Territorians and Indigenous Australians in remote areas more broadly; and
- Relationships between economic development, major investment and population change in the Northern Territory

2. TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Understanding ways to work across diverse knowledge systems to undertake research that engages people in policy formation, knowledge management and production that produce outcomes for participants’ benefit.

Principal Scientist:

Professor Michael Christie

Key areas of work:

Formal demographic analysis and modelling for small and relatively isolated populations including work with Indigenous academics to articulate distinctive indigenous methodologies, and to professionalise indigenous researchers and consultants (see www.cdu.edu.au/yaci).

Interest in questions of evidence and accountability, ethics and agreement making.
Interest in the uses of websites and other digital technologies to preserve the complexity of the issues and practices we work within, and make our processes and outcomes accessible to the people we work with from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. The collaborations which our research enhances, allow us to focus on front-line policy work, and organizational culture.

We work with people ‘on the ground’ in urban and remote communities and across all levels of government to identify and support those local practices which are successful and productive, but often invisible from above.

3. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ECONOMIES

Recognising and addressing social and systemic barriers to diverse group participation, economic activity, active citizenship and the links to the development and implementation of social policy.

**Principal Scientist:**
Professor Rolf Gerritsen and TBA (Position currently advertised)

**Key areas of work:**

This research seeks to understand the way that power plays out in our communities enabling groups’ social participation. Projects investigate and recommend new approaches to recognise and address social and systemic barriers to diverse group participation and active citizenship. Projects develop a deep understanding of intergroup relations in the region. This research will inform policy and programs.

Research conducted under this theme covers social and economic impact assessments to gain an understanding of stakeholders’ (community, industry, NGO’s, government, specific interest groups) perceptions of the likelihood of impacts. The aim is to identify the intended and unintended social consequences, positive and/or negative, of planned developments and interventions, which can range from policies, programs, plans and projects and associated change in the social fabric invoked by those developments and interventions.

4. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND PATHWAYS

Identifying ways to support and develop sustainable workforces in a competitive market, in regional and remote areas and in large scale and microbusinesses.

**Principal Scientist:**
Associate Professor Ruth Wallace

**Key areas of work:**

This theme explores the questions, issues, challenges and opportunities for developing, implementing, operating and sustaining an integrated workforce in diverse contexts. Working environments include not only those in regional and remote areas but also changing workforces as a result of policy priorities, such as growing local capacity and opportunities such as climate change.

Through innovative research this theme articulates the perspectives and actions of staff, institutions and employers under context specific economic and social pressures and identifies,
applies, evaluates and approaches that build local capacity now and in the future. The research supports decision making that is relevant locally in the short and long term and utilises innovation to better understand and support the growth of a sustainable workforce, manage attrition and turnover as part of the business cycle. This is particularly valuable where communities are aiming to grow and sustain a local workforce but growing or changing demands require access to a skilled workforce today.

The research explores ways to understand and address the keys to active transition between the worlds of work and learning in remote, rural and urban settings and assess the return on investment in various workforce development strategies. It also explores the application of systemic use of multimedia technologies to support workforce engagement and development across diverse languages, contexts and purposes.

5. SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

Social impacts and processes of the changes in the Northern Australia related to infrastructure development, public policy, climate change and migration.

**Principal Scientist:**

Dr Tom Rayner

**Key areas of work:**

In the multidisciplinary collaborative environment offered by the Northern Research Futures network, social and policy research investigates the links between human migration and minimisation of the social risks. Social impact may also relate to increases in climate change refugees, and therefore, the consequent pressure on northern coastal resources are also likely to increase. The research will enable focus on (among others) public policy and regulatory issues associated with the relationships of human migration across to Northern Australia and the risks associated with transmission of disease and pests. This will also link to key activities identified by Beale related to ‘more effective links between the various government agencies’ and consultation of key industry stakeholders.

6. EVALUATION OF SOCIAL POLICY

Evaluation approaches that work to engage people in remote communities, funders and policy makers in the evaluation process to support understanding evidence building and engaging people in the evaluation process and its outcomes.

**Principal Scientist:**

Dr Allan Arnott

**Key areas of work:**

This specialised evaluation program, focuses on collaborative and empowering evaluations, typically involving multiple methods including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This team’s evaluations typically offer some special features:

- an emphasis on working with stakeholders to clarify their processes and desired outcomes, often achieved through a Program Logic model and ideally beginning at the project design stage;
development where required of databases and also data collection support, often involving substantial innovation and targeting the needs of program participants where literacy and English language fluency present challenges;

researchers and evaluators with capacity to provide an Indigenous perspective on issues and experience working in remote community contexts, and;

an emphasis on policy-building evidence as well as theory-building findings and methodologies.

CONTACT:

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