


MEMORANDUM

To: University Community
From: Andrés G. Gil, Vice President for Research 
Date: September 25, 2013
Re: Extreme Events Institute (EEI)

I am pleased to announce that FIU now has an Extreme Events Institute (EEI) and that the International Hurricane Research Center (IHRC) is part of the new EEI structure. To assure optimal coordination, Professor Richard Olson, an internationally recognized leader in disaster research from FIU's Department of Politics and International Relations in the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), College of Arts and Sciences, will head up both the new EEI and the IHRC. Professor Keqi Zhang, who has served with distinction as Interim Director of the IHRC for several years, will remain a key member of the EEI team, including leading an IHRC laboratory focusing on coastal flooding, including sea level rise.

The goal of the EEI is to achieve research synergy across the social and behavioral sciences, physical sciences, computer science, public health, management, and engineering in the multi-hazard study of extreme events and responses to them. The structure of the EEI is intended to efficiently foster interdisciplinary research. Thus, the IHRC, including its Wall-of-Wind laboratory, is part of the EEI structure, and we expect that as research grows and progresses in this area, other centers may be created under the EEI. Currently, there are plans for the possible creation of a Disaster IT Center to be led by faculty from the School of Computing and Information Sciences.

It is a pleasure to make this announcement with the news that the Institute has just been awarded a Cooperative Agreement with the United States Agency for International Development—Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) for the project “Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the Americas – Second Phase: Building Resilience.” This new project, led by Professor Juan Pablo Sarmiento (from the Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work) and Professor Olson, will commence in April 2014, and is for two years at \$1.99 million. It follows on their five-year, \$5.6 million project under a previous cooperative agreement with USAID/OFDA, which will end in March 2014.

The IHRC is also slated to receive new external funding with the project “Florida Public Hurricane Loss Model: Enhancements to Estimate Losses from Storm Surge and Flooding.” It is set for \$1.5 million for the first year of what is expected to be a three-year project. This project will be led by Professor Shahid Hamid (Department of Finance, College of Business), Professor Keqi Zhang (Department of Earth and Environment, SEAS, College of Arts and Sciences), and Professor Shu-Ching Chen (School of Computing and Information Sciences, College of Engineering and Computing). This is a very important project for Florida and has implications for other coastal states. It will both deepen and refine understanding of the insurance implications of our state's combined vulnerabilities to hurricane force winds, storm surge, and flooding, which Superstorm Sandy so vividly demonstrated last year in the Mid-Atlantic States. With great work by FIU's Governmental Relations team, the funding will be provided by the State of Florida Office of Insurance Regulation (FL-OIR). These funds are in addition to their annual \$600,000 of support, recently re-approved, to Professor Hamid and his team for the underlying model on which the storm surge and flooding enhancements will be built.

Please join me in wishing Dr. Olson and all the members of the EEI and IHRC success. I encourage all faculty with interest in this important area of research to our community's future to seek out Dr. Olson.