
Subject: Interdisciplinary Research Centers

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1. Purpose

The Commission on Research recommended that this policy and procedure governing the Interdisciplinary Research Centers (IRC) be developed to (1) reflect and articulate previous policy guidelines, and (2) recognize more recent State Council for Higher Education requirements for the systematic review of interdisciplinary centers. This policy applies to "university" centers that involve more than one discipline and cross college lines.

2. Policy

2.1 Definition

For the purpose of this document, an interdisciplinary research center is a group of academic faculty and their associates (research associates/scientists, graduate students, undergraduate students, classified staff) from more than one college, formally recognized by the university, and reporting directly to the Office of the Provost, banded together to pursue research goals that require input from two or more disciplines. The term "center" may include such synonyms as "institute," "laboratory," "group," etc. Such centers are to be recognized as "university" centers to distinguish them from centers established within a college or department.

2.2 Establishment

Requests to establish an interdisciplinary research center should be discussed with the department heads and deans or associate deans for research of the participating faculty. The request should then be directed to the Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs. If a department or college official declines to support the request, the organizing faculty may appeal to the Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs with the understanding that he/she will carry the request to the appropriate associate deans and department heads for a full discussion of the issues. The Associate Provost will consult with the appropriate colleges and departments on all requests to establish an interdisciplinary research center and will seek advice from the Commission on Research. Action by the commission will be advisory to the department heads, deans, Associate Provost, Vice Provost and Provost.

In general there are two basic criteria for the establishment of an interdisciplinary research center;

1. A *de facto* center exists. Faculty are working together on research problems requiring an interdisciplinary approach; they are serving on each others graduate student advisory committees; regular research meetings and seminars involving the group take place. Center designation is recognition of that group and its activities.
2. A significant funding opportunity is available that requires a "center" or umbrella organization to exist in order to submit a proposal or to be competitive for an award. By their nature these funding opportunities must be for interdisciplinary research and must be available over an extended time period.

Interim approval of center status may be given in order to expedite the response to a funding opportunity or to provide a mechanism for a group to organize. Interim approval will usually be limited to one calendar year.

2.3 Mission and Plan

The request to establish a center must define in concise language the mission of the proposed center and a strategic plan that will move the center toward achieving the mission. It is against this mission statement and plan that the downstream evaluation of center activities will be made.

2.4 Governance

The request to establish a center must define the governance of the proposed center. Who will sit on the board? What are the responsibilities of the board? How is the board appointed? By whom? What is the length of the board's term in office? How often does the board meet? Who calls meetings of the board? How is the center director to be selected? By whom? What is the length of the director's term in office? To whom does the director report? What are the director's duties and responsibilities?

There is no requirement that every center be identical. The governance structure of each should reflect the unique needs of that center.

2.5 Funding

The request to establish a center must address funding for the proposed center at two levels:

1. The direct costs to support the research activities of the center must be identified, at least in general terms. What are the potential sponsoring programs and agencies? Are there specific opportunities currently available?
2. The indirect costs such as space, facilities, and general administrative costs must be specified. The proportion of the director's time to be devoted to center activities; the need for an assistant or associate director; the need for other administrative staff and for clerical and technical staff; space; specialized facilities; office upfitting and continuing costs must all be identified. Proposed methods of funding these requirements must be suggested. If any college or department resources (including a return of indirect cost recoveries to the proposed center) are anticipated, this will require the concurrence of the relevant college deans and department heads.

There is no fixed model for center funding. In some cases the Research Division funds a portion of a faculty position for the director and a portion of a clerical position. There may be some agreement that a portion of the returned overhead on center projects is returned to the center to fund new center initiatives. The guiding principle is to attempt to meet the needs of the center to enable it to accomplish its mission within the constraints of limited resources.

2.6 Proposal Submission

Almost invariably, centers occupy space, particularly laboratory space, which is assigned to and under the control of a college and a department. Often, other college and department resources are used by a center as well. These resources may be confined to a single college and department, or primarily so. College deans and department heads are responsible for the resources assigned to their units, and only they can make commitments of those resources.

It is imperative that proposals originating in centers have the explicit approval and commitment of college and department resources by the college dean (or associate dean) and the department head.

2.7 Project Administration

When a proposal originating in a center is funded, the project is established in the center. Subprojects may be established in other departments if such was part of the proposal. Indirect cost recoveries will be distributed according to the agreements referred to in the FUNDING section of the center charter.

2.8 Review and Evaluation

Each interdisciplinary center should submit to the Office of the Provost an annual report at the end of each calendar year. The annual report should address the mission and plan. Updated or modified center plans should accompany the annual report. Each interdisciplinary center will be established for a fixed time, five years unless there are prevailing reasons for a shorter or longer term. In the final year of authorization, the center will undergo a thorough review and evaluation of its activities and accomplishments. The review will include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the director and his/her suitability to continue. The review will be organized by the Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs.

The review committee will nominally consist of three faculty, a department head, an associate dean for research and a member of the Commission on Research. The faculty on the committee should have some knowledge of the research field of the center but should not be directly involved with the activities and programs of the center. The department head and associate dean should be from units that the center most directly impacts. Again, they should not be directly involved in center activities. The review committee will develop its own structure, procedures and methods of operation. The review will measure the accomplishments of the center against the mission statement. The review committee will be free to develop other measures of success that seem appropriate. Among these might be: funding history of the center and associated faculty; the number of faculty, students and others involved with center activities; the perceived success of the center by faculty cohorts, relevant deans and department heads.

2.9 Reauthorization/Termination

The terminal year review of a center should make some specific recommendations:

1. The center should be reauthorized or terminated. If the review committee recommends reauthorization, it must include a request for reauthorization in the same manner and format as for initial establishment. The Commission on Research will follow the same procedure as for the establishment of a center. If termination is recommended, the center will have one calendar year from that date to conclude its affairs. The redistribution of any remaining center assets will be the responsibility of the Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs in consultation with appropriate deans and department heads.
2. If reauthorization is recommended, the review committee must also make a recommendation as to the continuation of the director. If a change in directors is recommended, the appointing authority specified in the GOVERNANCE section will select a new director.
3. The review committee may make any other recommendations they deem appropriate regarding the operation, structure, governance, direction or other activities of the center.

2.10 Charter

Requests to establish a university center should address all of the points above and others that may be unique to the proposed center in a document that will be known as the CHARTER of that center. If the center is established, the CHARTER shall be signed by the center director (interim or permanent) and the Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs or other persons designated by the Provost. The date of the CHARTER shall be the beginning date of the center.

3. Procedures

4. Definitions

5. References

6. Approval and Revisions

Approved December 12, 1990, by Commission on Research.

Approved November 5, 1991, by University Council.

Revised and approved October 23, 1996.

- Revision 1

Section 2.2. Changed title from Associate Provost for Research to Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs.

Section 2.5 eliminated "small operating budget" as possible center funding from the Research Division.

Section 2.9. Revised process for reauthorization of a center.

Approved August 1, 1999, by Associate Provost for Interdisciplinary Programs, Kenneth L. Reifsnider.

Annual review October 30, 2001 by Vice Provost for Research, Leonard K. Peters. No revisions.