Centers & Institutes

Description
Centers and institutes are established within the University to strengthen and enrich programs of research, instruction or public service conducted by the faculty and staff. They also may provide undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with added research opportunities, facilities, and assistance, as well as enhance their involvement in public service and educational activities. Centers also have a strong positive impact on the economic development of the state by providing job opportunities, supplying technical assistance and training, fostering community development, and enhancing the transfer of new technologies. By engaging in partnerships with organizations such as private or corporate sponsors, educational institutions, and federal or state agencies, centers serve as an important means to address the diverse mission of the University.

For the purposes of classification within the UNC System, there is no technical distinction between the terms "institute" and "center." Both typically offer interdisciplinary programs attracting faculty, students, and staff from various academic departments. In practice, an "institute" frequently refers to an activity with a broader scope than a "center." For example, an institute may create centers as separate units within its administrative structure. For simplicity, this document refers to both centers and institutes as "centers." Centers are classified as research, public service, or instructional according to their primary mission, although any center may engage in all three activities.

The UNC Board of Governors (BOG) must approve research and public service centers that are interdisciplinary in nature under the procedures outlined in Administrative Memorandum #373 – Policies and Procedures for Planning, Establishing, and Reviewing Centers and Institutes in The University of North Carolina. Those centers that are not interdisciplinary need not receive BOG approval; such centers are most frequently characterized by the lack of significant participation of faculty from more than one department, or the lack of a significant interdisciplinary focus (e.g., involvement of departments with similar disciplinary foci). In contrast to typical research and public service centers, instructional centers may require little in additional appropriations or extramural support via grants or contracts. As a consequence, an instructional institute or center may not be required to receive formal BOG authorization. However, interdisciplinary instructional centers should submit an authorization to plan under Administrative Memorandum #373 and the President, in consultation with the Vice President for Research and the Vice President for Planning, will then decide whether formal BOG authorization is required.

Purpose
In order to contribute significantly to University strategic goals, centers must build excellence and/or visibility. Moreover, any center consumes scarce organizational resources, whether those resources are dollars or merely reporting and oversight responsibilities. Thus, there must be good reasons for creating a new center, such as:

- providing an alternative classification structure to that which already exists in the department or college in order to bring diverse groups of faculty together;
- providing more focused administrative or technical support for proposal and project activities beyond that provided by departments; or
• creating and maintaining better visibility for activities that come under the organization’s umbrella.

For example, one of the principal ways in which we can increase federal funding is to pursue larger, more complex projects involving teams whose membership comes from more than one college. Another way is to secure support for groups of related projects, whereby our competitiveness and visibility are increased by the sheer volume of our activity. Both of these mechanisms might be well served by the creation of appropriate centers.

The reasons for creating a center should be sufficiently concrete that they can be expressed in the form of objectives to be achieved over the first five years. Such objectives should be both quantifiable and measurable, and serve two purposes. First, when compared with current conditions, they define the value to be added by the center. Second, they provide criteria for an evaluation of the center at the end of five years. Objectives can be classified under five broad performance factors:

- research/scholarship;
- external professional recognition;
- external outreach/service;
- involvement of faculty and visiting scholars; and
- student support and involvement.

In addition to adding value, a center’s objectives should be strategically aligned with the University’s academic plan. The consideration of strategic benefit is intended to be very broad. For example, research centers in well-funded disciplines must obviously focus, in part, on the leveraging of external funding. But there are also many important disciplines in a research university for which external funding is scarce or non-existent, but for which a center might significantly add value through new organizational structures, new faculty interactions, visibility, outreach, recognition, and/or the education of students. The degree to which the center should add value would depend, in part, on the resources required in establishing the center. A center that exists within a department and requires few resources outside of the department might not be expected to achieve objectives comparable to a large interdisciplinary center that receives significant University core funding. But, in all cases, there must be value added and it must be explicitly identified.

Funding
No single funding model can fit all centers. Core (administrative) funding may come from a variety of sources, including departments, colleges, the University (Provost), and private sources outside the University. Some centers will be established under agreements with external agencies (public or private) that provide project and/or operating funds. Centers that provide services to non-governmental organizations can also charge administrative fees on top of direct and indirect costs, but government funds (federal, state, or local) cannot generally be used for non-project-related expenses. On the other hand, some centers will have minimal expenses beyond direct project costs and, in addition to external grants, might subsist entirely on funds provided by a department or college.
Centers that propose to add value through increased external funding or increased visibility will usually achieve that increase through some form of entrepreneurship. A center’s director is usually its chief entrepreneur and would therefore be expected to devote considerable time to the entrepreneurship needed to expand the center’s work. Thus, in addition to the director’s salary, any costs associated with entrepreneurship (e.g., travel, communications, etc.) would also be borne by the center. Moreover, federal audit regulations prohibit distributing clerical costs among multiple projects, so a center must also fund the administrative staff necessary to provide services to center faculty, and center funding plans need to reflect such costs. External funding commitments to proposed centers will weigh heavily in the decision to create new centers, under the assumption that external funding is committed on the basis of significant external review or evaluation. Centers requiring internal funding must obviously demonstrate significant value added as well as significant strategic alignment with University objectives.

In general, proposals to establish new centers that require University funds beyond existing college resources will be submitted to the Provost in late February as part of deans’ annual requests for new permanent funding. New center proposals therefore need to be developed early in the academic year in order to receive appropriate consideration and be prioritized at the college level prior to the February budget request.

In addition to the consideration of new center proposals as part of the annual budget request cycle, the Associate Provost for Research and Federal Relations will coordinate new center requests in response to unusual strategic opportunities involving external relationships or funding.

**Proposal and Award Credit and Indirect Cost Return**

A center will always be dependent upon chairs and deans encouraging their faculty to participate in center activity. If the University is rigorous in developing centers on the basis of value added, then a center can be a major asset to a chair, in that a faculty member may have a better chance of success in submitting a proposal through a center rather than through a department. The center’s visibility, management capability, and track record carry considerable weight in a proposal review. Thus, if a department gets the same credit and recognition in either scenario, an astute chair should promote the center route. Such credit and recognition is resident in the return of indirect costs to the department and the credit for proposals and awards by unit. Thus the investigators’ home departments will continue to receive the University’s ten percent overhead return, and monthly reports of proposal and award activity will continue to reflect faculty activity by academic department. At the same time, a parallel monthly report will summarize the proposal and award activity of centers.

**Reporting**

The creation of a center carries with it expectations for performance and meeting specific objectives. These expectations, in turn, should result in a reporting relationship to an appropriate official who can ensure that appropriate University interests are met. Such a reporting relationship would be in addition to whatever other academic reporting relationship exists within the department or college. Centers that involve more than one college will be expected to report to an appropriate associate provost unless a convincing argument can be made for reporting to a single dean.
Centers and Institutes Committee
In order to secure advice on matters related to the creation and evaluation of centers, the Provost will appoint five faculty members to serve on a Centers & Institutes Committee (CIC). Appointments to the CIC will be for three years and will be staggered so that not every member rotates off at the same time. The Associate Provost for Research and Federal Relations will chair the CIC and serve as a sixth member ex officio. In making these appointments, the Provost will seek faculty from diverse disciplines who have a demonstrated ability to think strategically and broadly about University-wide issues.

Procedures for Establishing New Centers
Faculty wishing to propose a new center should prepare a one- to two-page concept paper with the following information:

- Name and category of proposed center (research, public service, or instructional)
- Participating academic units and the number of faculty involved from each unit
- Organizational and reporting structure
- Short description of proposed activities
- 5-year goals within some or all of the following performance factors:
  - Research/scholarship
  - External professional recognition
  - External outreach/service
  - Involvement of faculty & visiting scholars
  - Student support & involvement
- Required resources & sources of support (including whether the proposal is contingent upon receiving internal funding)

The concept paper should be submitted early in the fall semester of the academic year, under deadlines to be announced by each college, to the appropriate dean(s) for consideration as part of the annual budget request. Deans will establish college review procedures to examine how the proposed center contributes to the University’s academic and strategic plans and adds value in the areas of external funding, scholarship, visibility, outreach and service, faculty involvement, and/or student support. For those centers that are to be submitted to the Provost within the colleges’ funding priorities, as well as those centers for which no additional funding is required, detailed 5-Year Plans should be prepared in the following format:

- Description
- Mission
- Administrative and reporting structure (including advisory boards)
- Resources (what you have; core support needs; what you need; sources of support)
- Programs & activities
- Relevance to University mission
- Organizational capacity (are proposed advisory bodies and/or administrative staff appropriate for what needs to be done? If the center will submit a lot of proposals, will the center provide administrative support for the submission process, or will faculty have to get their own departments to help? How will advisory boards be utilized? Will the center have sufficient technical staff? How will the center respond to opportunities? Discuss entrepreneurship.)
• Performance factors (measurable goals on which the center will receive preliminary evaluation in three years and formal evaluation in five years), selected from the following categories:
  o Research/scholarship
  o External professional recognition
  o External outreach/service
  o Involvement of faculty & visiting scholars
  o Student support & involvement

Upon receipt of a center plan, the Provost will ask the CIC to analyze the request under the following criteria:

  • Contribution to academic and/or strategic plans
  • Value added
  • Budget and funding plan, including realism of external funding goals

Following analysis by the CIC, the Associate Provost for Research and Federal Relations will forward recommendations to the Provost, including:

  • Whether the proposed center should be further considered and under what conditions;
  • Whether it requires BOG approval;
  • How it fits the Academic Plan and strategically serves University objectives;
  • How it delivers value added; and
  • What it will cost and who will support it.

The Provost will then incorporate center requests into college budget allocations based on strategic objectives and the availability of funds. For those centers receiving positive evaluations and necessary funding, the University will either submit a Request for Permission to Plan to the Office of the President or, if it is determined that the center does not require BOG approval, establish the center. The Associate Provost for Research and Federal Relations will assist the center team in converting the various materials already requested to appropriate BOG formats.

**Evaluation of Centers**
Centers will be established for a period of five years with a formal evaluation in the fourth year as to whether the center has made satisfactory progress toward its goals (performance factors). In order to continue to operate, the center must receive an affirmative action in this formal evaluation. Failure to do so will automatically terminate the center, with University funding reverting to the Provost.

Evaluation procedures will be developed through a consultative process involving the CIC, associate provosts, deans, department chairs, and center directors.