



Guidelines to Create WPI Centers and Institutes

INTRODUCTION.

This document delineates the procedures for proposing, establishing, reviewing, and discontinuing centers and institutes at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Centers and Institutes (C/Is) are critical to the mission and vibrancy of the University by addressing challenging problems and exploring new and exciting opportunities. They embrace the University's interdisciplinary culture by connecting faculty through mutual and complementary interests that typically transcend departmental or disciplinary boundaries. They perform interdisciplinary research and/or educational activities that extend beyond the scope of any one of the University's academic units. They address broader issues and serve larger audiences than programs that are department or discipline-specific. By definition, Centers and Institutes are collaborative efforts and not the product of individuals. Centers and Institutes are flexible units by design, and hence their scope, mission, lifespan and size are highly variable.

Centers and Institutes support the mission, vision and strategic plan of the University and they contribute to the University's visibility and impact. Centers and Institutes are also focal points for interaction with research sponsors and serve to amplify the universities' competitiveness in obtaining research funding in the designated areas.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document, all references to Centers and Institutes refer to Academic Centers/Institutes.

Center: A Center is defined as a multi-disciplinary unit that is organized to conduct education and/or research activities. Such entity is characterized by less programmatic autonomy and less independence than an Institute. A Center is typically organized around the investigation of a fairly specific theme, issue, or project, but encompasses interdisciplinary work spanning a number of academic fields. The lifetime of a Center is often limited by the time and financial commitment to completing the particular project. Centers typically reside in academic units or Institutes and report to department chairs, Institute directors, or academic deans.

Institute: An Institute is a distinct unit that spans multiple schools and often occupies its own identifiable physical space. Its mission is the promotion of interdisciplinary research on some subject of broad concern and, often, the communication of this knowledge to a broader public. Institutes may engage in a variety of



research and educational activities, including the offering of undergraduate and graduate classes. Institutes report to the Vice Provost for Research; the Dean(s) of the schools having faculty participating in any Institute will be kept informed of its activities. An Institute may contain one or more Centers within its administrative structure. Institutes are expected to have substantial external funding.

Both Centers and Institutes are focused on externally supported research or educational activities. The director is normally a tenured faculty member. Centers and Institutes normally do not contain faculty lines outside of academic departments. It is not necessary for every Center or Institute to be identical; the governance structure of each should reflect the unique needs and characteristics of that Center/Institute.

Laboratory (or specialized laboratory): a single facility that is organized around a specific research need or objective, but which involves or serves more than an individual faculty member's research. Laboratories are normally directed by a faculty member and provide for a research staff that may include non-faculty personnel (e.g., research scientist, technician, etc.). Other research teams that typically do not extend beyond a Department may be designated as a "Laboratory".

ESTABLISHMENT

Centers and Institutes should facilitate interdisciplinary research and education that supports the mission, vision and strategic plan of the University. The establishment of a Center or Institute should lead to an intellectual environment that brings people together to address challenging problems and provide impactful solutions. In many instances, C/Is evolve from small groups of faculty working on a defined problem or in response to a particular funding opportunity.

Each Center/Institute should be established for a fixed period of time, usually five years unless there are prevailing reasons for a shorter or longer term. Shorter or longer terms must be explicitly described in the proposal or evaluation documents.

PROPOSING A NEW CENTER OR INSTITUTE

A written proposal is expected to be developed and approved in order to establish a Center or Institute. The proposal should include the following:

Mission and Vision: The mission and vision statements should clearly describe the purpose for establishing the C/I and explain how this mission is unique and distinct from that of other units and how it supports major strategic objectives of the University.

Goals and Objectives: The statement should further outline what the C/I expects to accomplish and provide clear and measurable outcomes. It should further justify how the C/I is expected to enhance impact and visibility of WPI.



Evaluation Criteria. The proposals should provide a list of qualitative or quantitative measures and associated goals that will be used to evaluate the success of the Center. As each C/I's mission is unique, the metrics for measuring success may differ accordingly.

List of Participating Faculty. A list of participating faculty, and their academic units, should be included, as should an appendix containing curriculum vitae of participating faculty.

Governance Structure. The proposal should address how the Center/Institute Director is chosen and for how long and what his/her duties and responsibilities are. It should further address management committees, if those are envisioned, and how their members will be chosen and what their role is. Centers and Institutes are encouraged to establish an advisory committee that provides guidance to the C/I's director regarding how to maximize their success (in terms of research, extramural funding, outreach/engagement, teaching, etc).

Space and Facilities Requirements. A description of existing laboratory and office facilities that will be used by the Center/Institute, along with a description of new laboratory, office, or other space and facility requirements of the new Center/Institute should be included.

Funding/Budget. A description of new resources that will be required for the Center/Institute is expected to be provided, along with a description of current, external and internal funds that will contribute to Center/Institute activities. The funding plan should be adequate to meet the strategic objectives of the Center over the expected period of its operation. The proportion of the Director's time to be dedicated to the Center/Institute should be described. If any University resources, including a return of indirect cost recovery, are anticipated or required, approval of the appropriate administrators should be included.

APPROVAL

Establishment of a Center/Institute has implications for the academic units with participating faculty. Establishment, therefore, of such an entity should have the approval of all involved Department Heads and Deans. Since establishment of a Center/Institute also confers University endorsement, the Vice Provost for Research in consultation with the Research Development Council, the Provost, and the University President should also provide their approval.

Criteria to consider for the proposed unit include the following.

- Alignment with the strategic direction of the School/University.
- Filling a need not already met by other entities in the School/University.
- A Group of faculty who are ready and able to provide leadership.
- Strategy for external support (philanthropy or sponsored activity).
- Positioning of the School/University in an important emerging field of inquiry.
- Inclusion of faculty from more than one School and have an agreed upon governance model.



- Commitment of internal support until external support is realized.
- Support of the School leadership of the faculty involved.

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 should require the approval of all administrators normally involved in the Center/Institute approval process. Interim approval is typically given for a specified period of time.

REVIEW AND EVALUATION

Each Center or Institute should submit an annual report to the Vice Provost for Research and respective Department Head and/or Dean at the end of each academic year. The annual report should summarize the activities of the Center/Institute for the past year and address progress towards the mission of the unit. Updates or modifications of the Center/Institute strategic plan should accompany the annual report.

In the final year of authorization, each Center/Institute is expected to conduct a self-study and undergo a thorough review and evaluation of its activities and accomplishments. The review should be organized by the Vice President for Research and shared with the Deans, Provost, and President. It should address the following objectives:

1. The review should address how the Center/Institute has met the mandate for which it was established, how it has been effective in meeting the goals that were stated in the approval documentation. The report should include a citation and evaluation of the scholarly products in keeping with the metrics for assessing the success of the C/I relevant to the mission of the School/WPI.
2. The review should further address the ways in which the C/I has enhanced the reputation of the University. This should include a listing of conferences or workshops hosted on or off campus; keynote addresses and invited presentations at state, regional or national meetings, service on federal panels, honors and awards, visibility both within and outside of WPI, and other significant contributions made by the members of the center/institute.
3. The review should look at the financial stewardship of the C/I, including the extent of external funding (from state, federal, private or philanthropic donations, or other sources) obtained by the C/I since it was last approved or reviewed. Funding should include both direct support and indirect cost recovery (if applicable). This assists in determining the present and future needs of each Center/Institute with respect to personnel and other resources.

4. The review should include the current format of the C/I, and if it should change, stay the same or change directions, and if so, what the future direction would be. In addition, the performance of its current leadership should be evaluated. Such Reviews provide a mechanism by which the members of a Center/Institute can express their views concerning the unit leadership.

The reviewers should obtain feedback from stakeholders and also may obtain data regarding the above aspects from various print or electronic documents; the self-study report; and/or interviews with the appointing officer, center director, center staff, and center affiliates (faculty, students, staff, others). The reviewers are expected to submit a single, concise written report, typically within one month following completion of the review of data. The report should address the areas listed above, with discussion of the degree to which the unit's mission is realistic, feasible, and capable of meeting the needs of the university and wider community; the feasibility of the unit's plans for the future; and recommendations for improving academic and administrative effectiveness. Following consideration of the review findings, the Committee is expected to make recommendations to the VPR and Provost regarding (1) the center's continued viability, (2) an action plan for changes or improvements, and (3) timeline for the next review.

TERMINATION/SUNSETTING

Following a review as described above or a formal written request by the administrative officer to whom the center or institute reports, the VPR and Provost may recommend the discontinuation of a center or institute under the following circumstances:

1. The unit unnecessarily duplicates the mission and/or activities of another unit WPI.
2. Insufficient financial, human, or facilities resources are available to support the unit.
3. The major supporting grant or award has been terminated.
4. The center or institute has failed to achieve its mission, goals, or objectives.
5. The mission, goals, and objectives of the center or institute are no longer congruent with those of the administrative unit to which it reports or the University.
6. The unit no longer meets the definition of center or institute as described in this document.

When it has been determined that a Center or Institute should not continue in existence, the Vice Provost for Research should move systematically to discontinue the operations of the entity. The administrative officer to whom the center or institute reports, in collaboration with the center director, will develop a plan for phasing out the unit to allow orderly termination or transfer of contractual obligations and an effort to find alternative employment for full-time staff. Normally, the phase-out period will not be more than one year in duration.