

POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF RESEARCH INSTITUTES, CENTERS, AND RELATED ENTITIES* ([see note](#))

PURPOSE

To enable research, academic, and extension programs to more fully develop interdisciplinary opportunities in specific focus areas of the university, formation of collaborative partnerships is desirable. These entities, working in partnership with the various academic, research, and extension units, can provide resources, enable collaborations, and create synergies that leverage the collective efforts of participating faculty in a manner difficult to foster within a single academic unit. Such entities provide an umbrella for establishing reputation and excellence, resulting in the creation of major external funding opportunities.

Universities have developed institutes, centers, and other such entities as administrative structures for the purpose of conducting research and academic endeavors along broad, multi-disciplinary thematic lines, just as academic departments and colleges were created previously by universities for the purpose of instruction and credentialing. In this sense, they are parallel and complimentary structures with different purposes. It would also seem advisable to link these parallel structures to the parallel missions of the land-grant university (learning, research, and service).

For these entities to effectively utilize academic and research faculty and meet the expectations of the university constituencies, the entities' customers, and other stakeholders, there must be a clear understanding of the principles of operation of these entities. The purpose of this document is to outline the general principles that apply to all formal collaborative partnerships.

BACKGROUND

It is clear that existing Institutes, Centers, Facilities, Laboratories, Units and other similar organizational entities within Mississippi State University are characterized by considerable diversity. They differ in the nature of their authorization, which ranges from Institutes and Centers defined by an Act of the State Legislature, to variously named units established by individual faculty members. In addition, they differ greatly in size, from a small instrumentation area within an individual faculty member's research laboratory to dedicated buildings with fully developed professional and clerical staffs. The budgetary support for the differing entities varies from nonexistent to several million dollars per year, and their purposes range from the conduct of limited contract or grant defined research to providing broadly based service functions and major research institute programs involving multiple principal investigators. Finally, the entities differ in organization, with some located within a single department on the Mississippi State University campus, while others span college boundaries and include faculty at the various off-campus locations, such as faculty from the Research and Extension Centers and the High Performance Computing Collaboratory branch at the Stennis Space Center.

The Board of Trustees for Institutions of Higher Learning recognizes over 150 institutes and centers with varying purposes and characteristics. Institutes and centers with extended roles and scopes are required to be presented to the IHL Board for approval. This document recognizes this

fact, and incorporates IHL Board procedures into the overall establishment plan for these entities.

One of the fundamental transitions occurring at Mississippi State University over the past few years has been an increase in extramural funding for multidisciplinary programs. Concurrently, there has been an increase in the number of full-time, extramurally funded faculty and staff positions located in Institutes and Centers. This document is also designed to ensure their role and recognition as a part of the University community.

CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

While it would be highly desirable to be able to clearly differentiate between the concepts of centers, institutes and other organizational designations as they currently exist on campus, the variety of uses and diversity of organization units that now exist under the same organizational designation makes this virtually impossible. In addition, some designations are (or may be) determined by funding agencies and even legislation; these cannot be changed. Consequently, there will not be an attempt to differentiate between types of organizational units based upon specific labels. Instead, reference to these collaborative efforts and their manifest organizational forms will be referred to as entities in this document. Therefore, the objective of the current document is to specify how such units regardless of title relate to the existing structures within the three divisions of the university, and how these entities can be developed and should operate.

In the creation of such entities in the future, a consistent use of the concepts of center, institute and other organizational designations will be required if the entity's existence is to be approved. The definitions of these concepts are:

1. Institutes are integrative units that address broad, interdepartmental, intercollegiate, and interdivisional programmatic initiatives, encompassing the overlapping interests of faculty from more than one department or college. Institutes serve to enrich the entire Mississippi State University community and are influential in attracting and retaining productive faculty, addressing special academic, research, and extension needs, and increasing the opportunity for external support and recognition. Institutes are administered through the office of a Director. The position of Director is a full-time or part-time administrative appointment.
2. Centers are typically interdisciplinary, collaborative efforts with a specific research, extension, and/or educational activity more focused than that of an Institute. Centers are directed by an individual faculty Director. Centers will usually receive ongoing administrative support, including budgetary administration, through a pre-existing administrative unit. Centers may be nested within the organization of an Institute when appropriate.
3. Facilities, Laboratories, Units, and other similar designations are used for entities, activities and partnerships within administrative units or shared between administrative units considered less formal or more limited than the scope of an Institute or Center. The

designation and operation of such entities will be negotiated and approved by the appropriate dean, director, or vice president.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

All collaborative efforts, or entities, described under this policy statement are expected to:

- Maintain the integrity and sustain the appropriate roles and responsibilities of the Departments and Colleges.
- Establish operating principles so that Departments and Colleges do not view these entities as competitors, but rather as resources to be utilized.
- Establish clear reporting and programmatic development patterns that ensure participation of departmental leadership and involved faculty.
- Recognize and support the role that full-time faculty and staff in these entities play in meeting the mission of the entity, and Mississippi State University.
- Ensure the flexibility and creativity in management of these entities.
- Define the appropriate route for accessing resources and establishing financial plans that are consistent with departmental, college and agency goals and procedures, and with the goal of leveraging base resources through substantial external funding.
- Establish the nature of governing documents that define the purpose of the programmatic activity, establish a set of goals, and describe the responsibilities of participating faculty and staff.
- Define the reporting procedures and detail the methods of evaluation for obtaining the goals and expectations of the activity.
- Specify the role for the Director of each activity in determining faculty appointments and contributing to the evaluation processes for promotion, tenure and merit salary considerations.
- Conform to the procedures for establishing collaborative entities.
- Provide for periodic reviews, including sunset reviews.

Faculty Integration and Recognition

- All entities should be viewed by academic, research, and extension disciplinary departments as a resource enabling their faculty and students, rather than as a competitor or a source of funding.
- Disciplinary faculty participating in funded research entities should be considered a part of the unit's researchers.
- Entity directors should provide input in annual disciplinary faculty evaluations, promotion and tenure applications, and salary incentives. The Director will work closely with the Department Head in this process by providing written documentation and participating in reviews.
- Faculty who are wholly located in entities and funded through either internal or extramural sources should be recognized as an important element of the University community, and essential to meeting the mission of the unit and the University.
- All faculty members must be affiliated with a department (or equivalent academic unit, e.g., library) appropriate for their disciplinary background for the purpose of future reporting

when necessary. This affiliation does not imply any official association with the department and as such carries no obligation on the part of the department for support or recognition. This affiliation will be approved by the appropriate Vice President and Provost/Executive Vice President at or shortly after hiring based on the credentials of the faculty member and the recommendation of the unit Head or Director. Any faculty member whose primary appointment is not within a given academic department may be added as adjunct faculty to that department/unit following established procedures for that department/unit and college. This may be for a variety of purposes, including service on graduate committees or departmental committees, and collaborative research relationships.

Establishment of Collaborative Entities

Establishment of these collaborative activities may be initiated by a department, college, division or an ad hoc committee of interested faculty and administrators. The following stages provide a generalized model for developing and evaluating an entity:

- An appropriate theme and thematic title should be selected.
- A planning group should be formed to establish a set of goals, evaluate the current programmatic strengths/weaknesses, and identify potential participants. The committee should represent the breadth of potential research and educational interests of the faculty, and include all potentially involved department heads.
- A preliminary proposal should be developed to delineate the goals and clearly define the purpose for the proposed activity. The proposal should be approximately 2 to 3 pages in length, containing a list of interested participants, and an explanation of the potential value and/or scientific need for the unit. Any major resource requirements or potential needs should be clearly identified, including startup and recurring costs, facilities or other resources.
- The preliminary proposal should be presented to the appropriate administrators for review. Departmental and college administrative support must be clearly defined.
- Both the name and the purpose of the entity must be approved by the Provost, Vice President for Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine, the Vice President for Research, and the President.
- A specific operating plan will be developed by participating faculty. This plan should include provisions for nominating a director, a listing of all interested faculty participants, a list of programmatic goals for a minimum of the first three years, and a schedule for evaluation of progress. Budgetary requests (if appropriate) should include regressive budgetary requirements for later years due to expected grants or fee income. In addition, there should be a sunset clause that provides for an initial three-year review and thereafter at five-year intervals. The sunset clause will outline the conditions under which the entity's activities will be terminated and how this will be accomplished.
- In addition the full proposal should include:
 - o Proposed Name of Entity
 - o Purposes and Functions
 - o Organization and Governing Document
 - o Overlap and Endorsements
 - o Evaluation Procedures
 - o Support

- o Administration of Grants
- o Staffing
- o Space Requirements
- It is important to provide an adequate amount of time and support for the development of these programs; however, it is equally important to define a set of expectations relative to their completion/termination. A thoughtful set of goals and evaluative procedures (user group or external audit) must be defined.
- An external peer review of the plans may be conducted.
- The operating plan should be approved by the appropriate head(s), dean(s)/director(s) and vice president(s).
- The proposal for an entity with an extended role and scope must be submitted to IHL (Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Institutes and Centers, March 2000) for approval; all others may be approved by campus administrators.

Management

- University-wide, cross-disciplinary entities should report directly to the respective Vice President (s). However, requests may be made for a Center or Institute to report to a college dean where it is deemed appropriate, and when such a reporting structure is supported by the deans or other participating colleges.
- All entities should have an advisory board with prominent members who speak to the vision, mission, and excellence of the unit. Additional duties may also be assigned to the advisory board based on unit-specific missions. The advisory board should assist in the evaluation of the entity's programs and goals once each year, resulting in a report to the appropriate administrators, heads of all academic units with participating faculty, and to all participating faculty. All designated entities will provide a governing document that defines specific goals. This governing document is expected to: a) specifically address the academic/research/service goals of the activity; b) provide a description of the proposed funding posture and goals of the activity from the initiation to the sunset evaluation; c) identify the administrative channels for the activity; and d) describe the methods proposed to evaluate progress. The technical and instrumental support functions that may be dedicated to an entity, including personnel, shall be under the supervision of the Director. Eligibility for faculty membership shall be based on criteria developed by the Director in consultation with other members of the unit and an advisory board, if there is one, and must be consistent with those criteria defined by the policies of the college, university and related agencies. Requests for faculty participation must be approved by the appropriate department head. Time-limited memberships, with renewal based on contributions to the activity, should be defined. The term "faculty" as used in these guidelines includes individuals with academic, research, clinical, or extension appointments. Faculty should be briefed on the benefits of participation in entity activities on a regular basis, particularly in terms of leveraging available infrastructure.

Funding

- Entities may require base funding to provide the infrastructure necessary to support faculty research and outreach/extension activities. This includes administrative, technical and

clerical salaries, equipment, contractual commitments, and supplies. It is the expectation that these entities will become self-sufficient in a reasonable amount of time.

- The infrastructure funding may be derived from university funding (E&G, MAFES, other), from block grants from funding agencies, from overhead funds, and from other funds. Each year, the Director should prepare a clear statement of the infrastructure funding, with approval from the appropriate Dean/Director, Vice President, or advisory board.
- Much of the funding of faculty activities through university-wide entities results from participating faculty leveraging the resources/reputation of the entity and winning competitive funding from various foundations and agencies. In these cases, faculty should ensure the commitments are met and the results are published in appropriately peer-reviewed outlets.
- University-wide entities may frequently have block funds from the university or from large federal grants that are then allocated to fund activities of individual faculty or groups of faculty. When the entity allocates such funding to faculty, it is essential that it be for enabling activities that have undergone external peer review and will lead to securing competitive funding.
- A peer review process should be established for all internal awards. Written procedures for reviewing proposals, assessing the proposed activities, and evaluating the results should be developed. At appropriate intervals, reports should be submitted by participating faculty to the Director documenting grant results, including meeting papers and abstracts, peer reviewed publications and generation of additional external support.

Management of Contracts and Grants of Associated Faculty

- Grants and contracts enabled by a particular entity should be managed by that entity. The total accomplishments enabled by the entity are important to the justification of its existence. Such activity may be evaluated with the following performance measures (weighted as appropriate for each unit): total external funding, number of students participating, number of resulting peer-reviewed publications, technology transfer, licenses and patents, others as appropriate.
- Disciplinary departments will recognize the value brought to the department by research funding based on the activities of the faculty of the unit, without regard to where the funding is managed. Similarly, an entity will receive credit when it is a resource that results in a winning competitive proposal by individual or groups of faculty.

Division of Returned Facilities and Administrative Costs

- The MSU Division of Research has established [Operating Policy 80.12 'Policy and Procedure Statement on Distribution of Recovered Facilities and Administrative Costs at Mississippi State University'](#) to address the distribution of these funds between units.

Review and Evaluation

- Each entity should undergo a well-defined annual review by the administrator to which it reports and its advisory board if it exists. Clear and consistent criteria to evaluate the performance of the unit must be used.
- The annual review should include a report that addresses at least the following issues: mission; vision; update of strategic plan; achievements, significance of existing activity; and the overall competitiveness within its environment.
- A negative review may result in closure, merger with another entity, redefinition of mission and/or strategy, and/or change of personnel.

Responsibilities of Director

The Director of the entity will be considered an administrative appointment (in the manner of a department head). The Director may also have an academic appointment in an academic department which may or may not involve assigned time in the department. The Directors responsibilities include:

- Solicits and maintains faculty membership with concurrence of Department Heads and Deans/Directors.
- Functions as a team-builder, and is proactive in working with individuals to achieve specific goals that are typically interdisciplinary.
- Develops and periodically updates strategic plan for achieving goals and objectives.
- Represents the entity to higher administration and external interests for resource and programmatic development.
- Coordinates preparation of proposals.
- Manages operating funds.
- Arranges for brochures, newsletters, or other communication aids.
- Supervises any support personnel.
- Coordinates action between it and other units.
- Provides input on affiliated faculty selection and periodic evaluation to Department Head(s) and Dean(s)/Director(s).
- Maintains supportive relationship with Department Heads, Directors and Deans of participating units.
- Efficiently and effectively uses resources so that department/unit administrators and faculty see value in their participation rather than additional burden in paperwork and lost efficiency.
- Provides leadership for periodic reviews.

Selection Process of Director and Terms of Office

Normally, the Director will be selected through an open search process conducted by a search committee composed of affected faculty and administrators. Replacement of directors of large entities normally will be selected by the usual process of a committee composed of representatives from the affected units. The Director will normally hold faculty status in an appropriate department and should have a demonstrated record of leadership in interdisciplinary programs, including resource development, and a broad understanding of the subject mission.

Supervision of Director

- Reports to appropriate Head (s), Dean(s)/Director(s) or Vice President(s). Will be evaluated annually by the senior administrator to which he/she reports, with consultation from unit members and the advisory board (if it exists). At the end of each three-year period, a thorough review and evaluation of the director will be conducted by the appropriate head(s), dean(s)/ director(s) or vice president(s). This review and evaluation will be based upon data solicited from faculty, staff, students, and other appropriate individuals. Following this review and reevaluation, a decision will be made by the appropriate head(s), dean(s)/director(s) or vice president(s) regarding the continued administrative appointment of the director.
- Is responsible to home department for personal research and education program.

Department Head and Relationship to Director/Entity

- Serves on Advisory Committee.
- Provides primary leadership role in faculty identification, development, evaluation, and recommendations for personnel action.
- Approves and encourages faculty participation in the entity and provides departmental support functions and resources for participating faculty.
- Administers educational programs for graduate students that are participating in the entity, unless program assigned to an intercollegiate faculty.
- Reviews and approves all proposals to internal or external sources that involve faculty from his/her respective department.
- Shares in distribution of indirect cost returns generated by faculty.

EXISTING ENTITIES OF ALL LEVELS

All existing entities of all levels must

- submit a statement of purpose and function, a governance document, and review and sunset procedures for approval by the appropriate dean(s)/director(s) and vice president(s).

REVIEW

The [Office of Vice President for Research and Economic Development](#) is responsible for the review of this OP as needed.

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Collaborative Research Units

* Note: Centers and other entities located outside of the Divisions of Academic Affairs, Research, and Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine are not subject to the provisions of this policy. The university recognizes the use of the designation "center" has broader usage than

the description of a research or academic center as defined in this document, and any proposal to designate an entity or activity as a center will be considered. Some centers as currently designated do not fit the model described in this document, and may be exempted from the requirements of this document by the appropriate vice president. Existing Research and Extension Centers of the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine have a geographic location and regional coverage of the state, and do not fall under these guidelines.

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