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Major Centers and Institutes Review Committee Report

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Date: 24 April 2006

Major Centers and Institutes Review Committee

Final Report

Process:

The Provost's Major Centers and Institutes Review Committee (MCIRC) met on several occasions during the 2005-2006 academic year to consider issues raised by Provost Nichols concerning the development, operation, and review of major centers and institutes at the University of Connecticut. The members of this committee are: Philip Yeagle, Chair (Molecular & Cell Biology), Faquir Jain (Electrical & Computer Engineering), Jeffrey Fisher (CHIP/Psychology), Carol Lammi-Keefe (Nutritional Sciences), Lisa Aultman-Hall (Civil & Environmental Engineering), Charles Lowe (Psychology), William Stwalley (Physics), and Robert Tilton (English). Ex-officio members are: VPRGE Gregory Anderson, Carol Welt (AVP, OSP), and Bruce Detora (CFO).

The Provost originally identified six existing University Centers as within our scope of inquiry:

Biotechnology/Bioservices Center
Booth Engineering Center for Advanced Technology
Center for Regenerative Biology
Environmental Research Institute/Center for Environmental Science and Engineering
Institute for Materials Science
Center for Health/HIV Intervention and Prevention (CHIP)

This group of University Centers was selected based on criteria outlined by the President's Research Administration Committee (PRAC). These criteria included the following:

- three or more tenure/tenure track faculty with independent external grants;
- faculty members from at least two colleges/schools;
- total annual research expenditures that exceed $1 million.

Discussions in the MCIRC explored in-depth the characteristics of existing University Centers as well as the characteristics that new University Centers should embody. In this process we solicited information (via questionnaire) from the directors of each of the University Centers. We also reviewed recent annual reports from the Centers and met individually with each of the center directors to gain further insights. Each of the directors was very responsive to the need of the MCIRC for information. In addition, some members of the MCIRC interviewed directors of centers at other universities to serve as case studies for our committee. Extensive discussions within the committee followed the information-gathering sessions.

During our deliberations, we came to recognize characteristics unique to each of the existing University Centers. These bodies fulfill research and service objectives, academic synergy functions, administrative functions, and/or some combination of these purposes. One center (Institute for Material Sciences) was established by state statute and therefore has a life governed by that statute. Other centers, such as the Biotechnology/Bioservices Center, have income from fee-for-service. (The rates for services in these

University Centers have varied in the past but are now being standardized according to University accounting principles.) Research in the Center for Health/HIV Intervention and Prevention depends largely on faculty grants, while The Center for Regenerative Biology has support from several sources. No two Centers within the scope of our charge are exactly alike.

To enable effective discussion, the Committee came to the conclusion that some center functions are sufficiently differentiated to require a separate term. University Research Centers must have an academic component. The Biotechnology/Bioservices Center focuses exclusively on services to researchers through its equipment and therefore does not meet the criteria set above for University Research Centers. While it will not be considered further in this report, the Biotechnology/Bioservices Center must meet all current University requirements for service or "recharge" centers. The five remaining University Research Centers identified above provide academic synergy, or have dual synergy/service functions.

Major questions from the Provost to the MCIRC:

A. Why does/should the University of Connecticut have University Research Centers?
B. How shall new University Research Centers be established?
C. What expectations does the University of Connecticut have from University Research Centers?
D. What general principles should govern the operation of University Research Centers?
E. How should University Research Centers be funded?
F. Should University Research Centers have a finite lifetime?

A. Why does/should the University of Connecticut have University Research Centers?

Research and creative activity are essential components of the mission of a major research university such as the University of Connecticut. University Research Centers contribute to that mission in a measure that exceeds what individual faculty members can achieve in the absence of the Center. University Research Centers catalyze the development of interdisciplinary scholarship beyond the normal domain of any single Dean or Department Head. This mission is growing in importance because funding agencies are increasingly looking to multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving. The synergy in a multidisciplinary Research Center offers a unique resource that the University can exploit to support scholarly productivity and to increase external funding.

B. How shall University Research Centers be established?

A proposal to establish a new University Research Center will be prepared by the participants in accordance with the criteria below. The proposal will be reviewed by the VPRGE.

1. A new Center must demonstrate that it will meet all criteria for University Research Centers delineated in this report.

2. A University Research Center must include three or more tenured or tenure-track faculty members with independent external funding. These faculty members must be from at least two schools and/or colleges.
3. The total annual research expenditures from external funding of University Research Center projects should exceed $1 million. These research expenditures must be subject to indirect costs.

4. A proposal to create a new University Research Center will contain a mission statement.

5. A proposal to create a new University Research Center will include a detailed initial budget with justifications for proposed expenditures.

6. A proposal to create a new University Research Center will describe a plan for operation within an initial 3 to 5 year time horizon, including programs and/or activities that the center might establish and manage, and an explicit agreement to "sunset" the center if, at some future point, it no longer meets the criteria for University Research Centers.

7. Promising proposals for new University Research Centers will be brought before the RAC for its input, as well as before other referees at the discretion of the VPRGE. A decision will made by the VPRGE in consultation with the Provost.

8. The decision to establish a new University Research Center will be publicized within the University of Connecticut community by the VPRGE.

9. All members of the University community who can contribute significantly to the mission of a University Research Center shall be eligible to be members. To maintain membership each member shall have a substantive connection and current contribution to the mission of the University Research Center.

C. What expectations does the University of Connecticut have from University Research Centers?

The University can invest in a limited number of University Research Centers. These typically will be in areas of rapid growth. Therefore it is imperative that University Research Centers increase external research funding brought into the University beyond what can be achieved in the absence of the University Research Center. The University requires a substantial return on its investment in terms of discernible metrics. The important metrics for a University Research Center will include, but not be limited to, scholarly productivity, IDC from grants, additional research grants, and the attraction of exceptional faculty and graduate students. Among the expectations of the University are:

1. University Research Centers must catalyze the *growth* of scholarly productivity. This will normally mean increasing external funding.

2. University Research Centers will be multidisciplinary and will foster interdisciplinary work; this will include the generation of large group proposals. Target stakeholders for University Research Center grants and programs, the clients and faculty using the University Research Center's services, and students training in a University Research Center will all contribute to its breadth of scholarly activity. Collaborative grants and publications, as well as multidisciplinary graduate student dissertation committees, will be evident.

3. Membership in a University Research Center should be extended to any member of the University community who conducts scholarly or educational activity that falls within its mission. Membership in each University Research Center will be posted on its website.

4. Equipment supported in full or in part by University funding shall be available to all members of the University community in support of research and scholarly activity whether or not those individuals are members of the University Research Center. Members and non-members shall be charged a fee for service, according to rates set by the University and in consideration of the level of support required by the scholar. Access may be limited by the level of technical expertise of the applicant, the availability of instrument time, and/or the resources of the University Research Center. Policies and procedures will be established and published governing such use.

5. University Research Centers are expected to produce annual budgets and annual reports.

6. University Research Centers will be in compliance with all University, State, and Federal policies and procedures.

7. University Research Centers will convene a meeting of their entire membership at least once per year.

8. Research and creative activity are essential components of the mission of a major research university such as the University of Connecticut. University Research Centers must contribute to that mission in a measure that exceeds what the individuals can achieve in the absence of the Center. Some of the ways in which successful centers have achieved such growth are: support of proposal development, maintenance of equipment and facilities in support of common research, seminars and "brown bags" to discuss new areas of research for proposal development, and grant management. The range of synergistic activities to promote research may include outreach and other types of community service.

D. What general principles should govern the operation of University Research Centers?

1. A University Research Center must have a Director. That Director will be appointed by the VPRGE and must report to the VPRGE and to all appropriate Deans.

2. The Director of a University Research Center must be a tenured faculty member of the University of Connecticut. Any exceptions must have the joint approval of the VPRGE (and Dean if a reporting relationship exists), and would most likely be approved as interim appointments.

3. Each Director will be a member of the (new) Council of University Research Center Directors, which will be created for the purpose of facilitating communication among directors to support and improve the administration of all University Research Centers. This Council will meet according to the wishes of its members, but will convene at least once per year. The VPRGE may be invited as an *ex-officio* member.

4. Each University Research Center shall have external reviews of its entire operation (as is done for academic departments) at least every 5 years. The review will contain: (a) a summary of activities since the previous review period from the Director; (b) statements from the University Research Center that describe how the University Research Center has and will continue to fulfill its mission and meet the criteria for University Research Centers; (c) a peer review of the University Research Center by qualified persons who are not members of the University Research Center and do not have a conflict of interest. Members of this review panel may come from outside the University. This review will be submitted to the VPRGE (and to any Deans to whom the center reports) who will make it part of the budget approval process as described below. The VPRGE, in consultation with the Provost (and other entities as appropriate such as the RAC), will decide whether to continue the University Research Center based on the review.

5. Any new University Research Centers established from this time forward should not be privileged to hire tenure-track or tenured faculty members. Faculty members should be hired in colleges/schools/departments and should then become members of University Research Centers subject

to the criteria of the Center. (When University Research Centers hire faculty, the ability to sunset a University Research Center when it outlives its usefulness to the University is made more difficult.)

6. University Research Centers shall not provide formula return of IDCs to PIs or Center members through funds, equipment, or any other form of support. Any (equivalent) returns from IDCs by the University to a PI shall be uniform and unrelated to membership in a University Research Center.

E. How shall University Research Centers be funded?

1. Some portions of a University Research Center's operation may be funded by the University if the criteria in this report are met. The VPRGE and the Provost will judge whether the University Research Center under consideration has sufficiently high priority to merit University investment, and whether sufficient resources can be obtained to support the investment.

2. There will be a uniform budget process for all University Research Centers. All requests for University funds, including funding for staff, equipment, administration, and/or maintenance, must be an explicit part of the budget request. The budget must identify all sources of support, both external and internal. Budget requests should contain the projected IDC from external funding generated by the center as well as the administrative costs allowed on external grants. The expectation is that the funding of the center will increase and generate a growing IDC component for the University.

3. In addition to research, administration, equipment, facility operations, and synergistic activities, budgets may contain plans for other appropriate activities, such as grant management, a support function highly valued by current University Research Center faculty.

4. A mature University Research Center must justify its budget through evidence of the growth exhibited by that Center. Rapid growth could justify a larger annual budget; lack of growth could lead to a decrease in annual budget.

5. Sources of support for a University Research Center may come from whatever combination of University funds best fits the Center as determined by the VPRGE, the Provost, and the CFO. University Research Centers shall not expect as part of their budget and shall not promise to its members an automatic return of IDCs. Investigations by the MCIRC revealed that a constant percentage of IDC generated or of grant expenditures would not work uniformly for all University Research Centers.

6. A University Research Center receiving funds of any sort from the University (e.g., positions, equipment funds, operating funds, etc.) must report directly to the VPRGE and to the appropriate Deans. Budgets and budget proposals should be submitted annually, in a uniform format, to the VPRGE by 1 January. As a part of the budget process, a report for the previous year should also be submitted annually to the VPRGE (and Dean if a reporting relationship exists). Approved budgets for all University Research Centers shall be available to any member of the University community and shall be presented to the RAC annually.

F. Should University Research Centers have a finite lifetime?

It is understood that University Research Centers are not permanent entities and may be phased out when the University Research Center no longer fulfills its role, meets a demand, or fails to meet University criteria or policy. University Research Centers will not be terminated without a review as described above (D.4).