

Consolidated Certification Process for University Research Centers

(Concert)

Purpose

Research centers are key components of the university's strategy to enhance research and academic excellence. Typically, a research center is an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary collective that aims to enhance university research activity, reputation, or prestige by leveraging the allocation of faculty time and other university resources to acquire extramural funding. Research is a primary component of the missions of research centers, but they also may be missioned to serve academic, public service, economic development, or other purposes. While the university as a whole is a center for research activity, the establishment of research center units is encouraged when additional levels of support, flexibility, and visibility may further the research enterprise.

Research center categories

Old Dominion University recognizes three categories of research centers: decanal centers, university centers, and university enterprise centers.

Decanal research centers typically have a research focus involving a single department or discipline, or a limited number of disciplines within a single college. Initial approval, renewal, and dissolution of these centers is by the dean of that unit, subject to certification by the Office of Research. Decanal center directors report to and serve at the pleasure of either a department chair or a college dean. Decanal research centers make Equipment Trust Fund (ETF) requests through their department or college, and may receive other supports provided by the dean or chair to which they report, such as allocation of research assistants, faculty workload allocation, in-kind administrative support, space and facilities access, or funding.

University research centers typically pursue an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary mission that spans disciplines in more than one college, or have a disciplinary focus but operate at a comparatively larger scale than typical decanal research centers. Initial approval, renewal, and dissolution of university research centers is by the Vice President for Research in conjunction with the dean or deans who supervise the constituent members. Directors of university research centers report to and serve at the pleasure of either a dean or the Vice President for Research. Centers that have university research center designation receive support from one or more deans, but also may make direct ETF requests to the Vice President for Research and receive other types of support from the Office of Research.

University enterprise centers are university research centers that have more administrative flexibility and receive enhanced indirect cost allocations relative to the traditional allocation formula. Enterprise status is granted to centers with a track record of, or strong potential for, exceptional extramural funding. The degree of administrative flexibility, as well as the level and utilization model for enhanced IDC allocations, are customized to each center.

New centers may be proposed as enterprise centers, and existing university research centers may apply for enterprise status. Decanal research centers may obtain university research center or university enterprise center status with the recommendation of the dean and the approval of the Vice President for Research.

Constitutional and performance criteria

The minimum constitutional criteria for research centers include a director with at least 20% annual workload allocated to center administration exclusive of sponsored projects, at least two constituent members, and at least one faculty constituent member. The minimum performance criterion for renewal of research centers is based on the three-year average of center annual research expenditures. Expectations related to this criterion are determined by the center supervisor and stipulated in the establishment, certification, or renewal proposal. In setting research expenditure expectations, center supervisors should consider both disciplinary norms and the opportunity costs associated with the investment of university resources in the operation of the center. Centers are expected to adopt additional key performance indicators and criteria in their business plans, befitting the unique mission of each center.

Consolidated certification process (*Concert*)

To be recognized by the university, all research centers must matriculate a certification process and meet constitutional and performance criteria appropriate to their category and discipline. The purpose of the consolidated certification process (*Concert*) is to align research center activities to university strategic goals, ensure accountability to diverse stakeholders, and promote recognition and support of research excellence.

Concert combines into one process all university policy requirements for research centers to have a business plan, an evaluation plan, a resource model, and a sustainability plan. It is designed to include all key stakeholders, and to be flexible enough to accommodate centers with diverse missions, organizational structures, and circumstances. *Concert* is used for the establishment, certification, and renewal or dissolution of research centers.

The *Concert* process involves the periodic creation and review of a proposal to certify a research center. The certification process is initiated when the supervisor designates a single point of contact (typically the center director) to coordinate development of the proposal documents and matriculate the approval process.

The center director will facilitate the development of a proposal comprised of two primary documents: a *center profile* and a *consolidated business plan*. Other documentation, such as external reviews, may also be included in the profile to augment the proposal.

Deans conduct the primary review for decanal centers and university centers with a disciplinary focus. Deans may develop their own college-level process to evaluate each proposal. At a minimum, the dean's process must include (1) a review of center key performance indicators for the preceding three years, and (2) an internal review of the proposal documents by a committee of at least three tenured faculty in the college who are not proposed to be constituent members of the center.

The dean's recommendation letter, a summary of the internal review including the composition of the faculty review committee, the center profile, the business plan, and any additional documentation are forwarded to the Office of Research for approval. The dean may recommend for certification or dissolution of existing centers, or for provisional certification of new centers.

The Vice President for Research grants or denies final approval by certifying that the approval process, business plan, and constitutional requirements have been met. University research center and enterprise center proposals are reviewed by the university faculty research advisory committee prior to approval and certification by the Vice President. In some cases, the Office of Research may coordinate an external review of the center to further inform the decision or to develop strategic guidance.

New center proposals

Proposals to establish new research centers may be initiated by tenured faculty, chairs, deans, the Vice President for Research, or the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Upon approval, new centers are provisionally certified for three years. Provisional certification is considered separately from any attendant enterprise status request (i.e., new centers may be approved even if the enterprise status request is not approved).

During the third year of operation, directors of provisionally certified centers submit an updated proposal to their supervisor, who conducts a review and recommends for either full certification or dissolution following the Concert process guidelines. If full certification is recommended, the supervisor submits the updated documents and a recommendation to the Office of Research for approval by the Vice President for Research. Upon approval, the center is certified as a research center for a period of five years.

Enterprise status requests

Enterprise status requests may be incorporated into new university research center proposals, or in certification proposals from existing university research centers. In either case, the enterprise center request is made via memo to the Vice President for Research. The memo provides a rationale for the request that states

- the specific proportion of IDC allocation enhancement, which may be up to 100% of the traditional allocation provided to investigators, departments, and colleges;
- the proposed allocation methodology (e.g., 100% to the center discretionary account); and
- how the additional funding will be used to enhance capacity to acquire sponsored projects.

The memo must carry signatory approval by the department chairs and deans whose IDC allocations would be affected.

Typically, the enterprise status request is attached to a certification proposal. Enterprise status may be requested separately only from university research centers with full certification.

Certification of existing research centers

Existing centers will be placed on a rotating certification schedule. By August 1, 2018, deans will identify up to three cohorts of centers within their colleges that are to complete the certification process by December 15 of 2019, 2020, or 2021, respectively. Deans will convey their cohort schedules to the Vice President for Research by July 31, 2018. The Office of Research will develop a schedule for centers supervised by the VPR. Inclusion on the schedule will convey provisional certification for those centers scheduled to complete the process after fall, 2019.

Provisional certification

Provisional certification is granted for a three year period to newly approved centers, after which time they submit updated certification proposals to be considered for full certification. Excepting this requirement, provisionally certified centers are treated as fully certified centers in every regard. New centers created under exceptional circumstances may be granted immediate provisional certification by the Vice President for Research, with a grace period of up to one year to submit a certification proposal.

Certification proposal component: Center profile

The Center profile is a template for conveying basic information about the center (name, mission, and membership), the start date of the business plan, and the purposes of the proposal. It identifies inter- and intra-institutional collaboration and relevant sponsored research activity. It also includes attachments of required and optional supplementary documentation, such as curriculum vitae, sponsored project summaries, and letters of commitment or support.

Certification proposal component: Consolidated business plan

The cornerstone of the *Concert* proposal is the center business plan. The business plan is developed, implemented, monitored, and adjusted by the center director in collaboration with stakeholders and the center supervisor (the chair, dean, or Vice President to whom the center director reports). Business plans should be developed for a five calendar year period commencing with the second semester following submission of the plan to the Office of Research for certification. For example, a plan submitted in July, 2020 would span the period January, 2021 through December, 2025.

Formative and summative evaluation of centers is embedded in the certification process, through review of the center profile and the incorporation of key performance indicator outcomes in the business plan. Two common research expenditure KPIs are required in all center business plans: direct costs and reimbursed indirect costs associated with center-related sponsored program activity. New center proposals may include a review of these KPIs as associated with the proposed faculty constituent members. Supervisors are encouraged to require the inclusion of additional quantitative or qualitative indicators that represent other unique aspects of each center's mission, such as education, outreach, or scholarship.