

Procedures for Establishing, Reviewing, and Discontinuing Centers and Institutes at UNC Charlotte

Updated August 3, 2023

A. Introduction

Centers and Institutes are established within UNC Charlotte to strengthen and enrich multidisciplinary programs of research, public service, or instruction conducted by University faculty and staff. They may also 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 and Institutes 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.

Centers and Institutes must avoid unnecessary duplication within the UNC System. Each unit should seek to differentiate its mission, activities, and/or clientele from other units, within the UNC System and to make its facilities available to other UNC System constituent institutions for cooperative activities as appropriate. The activities of a Center or Institute may be funded from state appropriations or from external funds sought for that purpose, or both. Unless organized specifically in response to legislation and appropriations approved by the North Carolina General Assembly to focus on a specific state need, each Center and Institute is expected to demonstrate a strong foundation of non-state support to justify its establishment and continuing operation.

These Procedures provide that at UNC Charlotte, Centers and Institutes are established or discontinued at the discretion of the Board of Trustees, after recommendation from the Vice Chancellor for Research and the Chancellor. These procedures provide implementation guidance supplemental to [University Policy 314, Centers and Institutes](#).

University Policy 314 provides that the Vice Chancellor for Research or their designee may appoint five faculty members to serve on a Centers & Institutes Committee (CIC) to secure advice on matters related to establishing, evaluating, and discontinuing Centers and Institutes, as needed. The Vice Chancellor for Research or their designee chairs the CIC and serves as a sixth member *ex officio*. In making appointments to the CIC, the Vice Chancellor for Research, seeks faculty from diverse disciplines who have a demonstrated ability to think strategically and broadly about University-wide issues.

The objective of these procedures is to provide a uniform framework governing the establishment, review, and discontinuation of Centers and Institutes at UNC Charlotte in accordance with [University Policy 314, Centers and Institutes](#), and to ensure the effective and efficient use of University resources.

B. Definitions

1. Centers versus Institutes

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. At UNC Charlotte, the term “institute” is reserved for an activity with a broader scope than a “center.” For example, an institute may create centers as separate units within its administrative structure. For convenience, this document will use the term “Center” to refer to both Centers and Institutes at UNC Charlotte.

2. Institutional, Interinstitutional, and UNC System Multi-Campus Centers and Institutes

Centers may be either *institutional* or *interinstitutional* in nature, and may be designated as research, public service, or instructional units. They may include the participation of other institutions, agencies, or organizations, such as other colleges and universities, schools, hospitals, industry, foundations, or governmental bodies.

Institutional Centers report to only a single campus within the UNC system. These Centers may collaborate with units or departments from other institutions for specific activities or projects, but fiscal and administrative oversight is limited to a single institution. Institutional Centers do not submit planning, establishment, or discontinuation requests to the Board of Governors, but are subject to the policies and procedures for establishment and review that are established by their respective campus.

Interinstitutional Centers that involve the participation of more than one UNC System constituent institution must designate one institution as the administrative campus, which will assume responsibility for the general and fiscal oversight in accordance with that institution’s policies and procedures. The UNC System Office, through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, can offer assistance and coordination during the planning phase of complex multi-campus efforts.

University System Multi-Campus Centers are established either to represent North Carolina in a federally funded and formula-based program, many of which require state matching funds, or through legislative action with requirements of multiple campus engagement. Such Centers will maintain varying levels of involvement from the UNC System Office throughout their life cycle, and are governed by University of North Carolina Board of Governors’ [Regulations for Planning, Establishing, and Reviewing Centers and Institutes in The University of North Carolina \(Regulation 400.5\[R\]\)](#).

[These Procedures](#) address *only* Institutional Centers at UNC Charlotte or Interinstitutional Centers where UNC Charlotte is the administrative campus.

3. Types of Centers and Institutes

A *Research* Center has research as its primary mission. Although classified as a research Center, such a unit may also provide instruction, training, technical assistance, or public service programs. Although such units do not have jurisdiction over academic curricula, they may offer courses in cooperation with academic units.

A **Public Service** Center has public service or technical assistance as its primary mission. Research, instruction, and training activities may also be conducted as secondary components of the mission. Although such units do not have jurisdiction over academic curricula, they may offer courses in cooperation with academic units.

An **Instructional** Center has training or instruction as its primary mission. Although designated for instruction, these units may also conduct research and public service activities. Although Instructional Centers do not have primary jurisdiction over academic curricula, they may offer courses in cooperation with academic units.

C. Authority and Lines of Responsibility

Authority to authorize establishment and discontinuation of Centers rests with the UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees, and Centers are responsible to the Board of Trustees through the Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, appoints the Center Directors.

Each time a Center has been authorized to plan, establish, or discontinue, the Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, will notify the UNC System's Office of Research and Graduate Education.

D. Purpose and Scope of Centers and Institutes

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 funds or merely reporting and oversight responsibilities. Thus, there must be good reasons for creating a new Center, such as providing:

- an enhanced environment and intellectual matrix for addressing complex and interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary issues;
- access to specialized facilities or instrumentation;
- a structure for the engagement of external communities; or
- a focal point for national or international excellence.

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 should serve two purposes. First, when compared with current conditions, the objectives should define the value to be added by the Center. Second, the objectives should provide criteria for an evaluation of the Center at the end of five years. Objectives can be classified under several broad performance factors:

- research/scholarship;
- facility utilization;
- engagement;
- visibility;
- faculty participation; and
- student support and involvement.

In addition to adding value, a Center's objectives should be strategically aligned with the University's mission and academic plan. The consideration of strategic benefits is intended to be very broad. For example, research Centers in well-funded disciplines obviously must focus, in part,

on the leveraging of external funding. However, 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 add significant value through new faculty interactions, engagement of external constituencies, and/or the education of students. In all cases, there must be value added, and it must be explicitly identified. In general, interdisciplinary and cross-college collaborations should be encouraged.

E. Funding

It is expected that Centers will derive some portion of their operating costs from external sources and not subsist solely on state-appropriated funds. Some Centers will be established under agreements with external agencies (public or private) that provide project and/or operating funds, and Centers that provide services to non-governmental organizations can also charge administrative fees on top of direct and indirect costs.

Centers that propose to add value through increased external funding will usually achieve that added value through some form of entrepreneurship. A Center's Director is usually its chief entrepreneur and therefore would be expected to devote considerable time to the entrepreneurship needed to expand the Center's work. Thus, any costs associated with entrepreneurship (*e.g.*, travel, communications, etc.) would also be borne by the Center. A realistic funding model will weigh heavily in the decision to create a new Center, and the successful implementation of that model will be a key factor in the evaluation of the Center Director's performance.

F. Authorization to Plan

A planning period can serve many purposes for a conceptualized Center, including time to demonstrate the validity of the concept, define partner relationships and roles, or identify fiscal and other resources required for sustainability. The authority to plan a new Center rests with college deans and faculty or staff wishing to plan a new Center must request an Authorization to Plan from their Dean. Minimum required documentation should include:

1. Relevance of the proposed Center to the mission of the University;
2. Objectives of the proposed Center and why the objectives cannot be achieved within existing institutional or University structures;
3. Discussion of differentiation from similar Centers or units within the campus, other UNC System constituent institutions, and the State, and proposed relationships with them;
4. Potential sources and estimated funding to initiate and sustain the proposed Center, presented as a five-year projection; and
5. A specific timeline and a set of milestones to be achieved for the planning period.

Each Dean or senior administrative officer may, at their discretion, specify additional information to be included in Authorization to Plan requests in their college or unit, and may set a specific annual schedule for the submission of such requests, or may choose to consider them at any time.

When a Dean or senior administrative officer grants Authorization to Plan a Center, the authorization must specify the planning period and required milestones, with a copy of the Authorization sent to the Vice Chancellor for Research.

Deans or senior administrative officers may also choose to test the validity of a Center concept by piloting a center as part of the Authorization to Plan process, but must employ the naming convention for a pilot center as described in Section K. below.

In unusual circumstances, the Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, will coordinate new Center requests that require timely action in response to unusual strategic opportunities involving external relationships or funding.

G. Authorization to Establish

When a Center approved for planning is ready and able to demonstrate its viability, the Dean or senior administrative officer should prepare and submit a formal request for Authorization to Establish to Vice Chancellor for Research. The minimum required documentation for the request for Authorization to Establish includes the items listed in the Authorization to Plan documentation as well as the following:

1. Name of the proposed Center, which appropriately reflects the Center mission and scope;
2. Category of the proposed Center (Research, Public Service, or Instructional);
3. Organizational structure of the proposed Center, including the name of a proposed Director (unless the Director is to be selected through a national search), description of the membership and function of any proposed advisory or policy boards, and proposed responsibility structure;
4. Statement on the anticipated effects of the proposed unit on the instructional, research, and/or public service programs of the University; and, when inter- institutional arrangements are involved, a statement on the anticipated effects of the proposed collaboration on the instructional, research, and/or public service programs of all participating campuses;
5. Statement on immediate operating needs, such as equipment, library resources, and space needs, and five-year projections of future space needs, with supporting letters from each Dean or senior administrative officer who will provide resources;
6. A detailed five-year budget, with supporting letters from each Dean or senior administrative officer who will provide space or monetary resources;
7. When relevant, evidence that any necessary interinstitutional arrangements regarding leadership, governance, activities, funding, or other aspects have been reached by the cooperating Chancellors or designees; and
8. An accountability plan that details the specific goals to be met at the end of the second year for the third-year charter review, and at the end of the fourth year for the formal fifth-year Center evaluation.

Upon receipt of a request for Authorization to Establish, the Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, may appoint and request the CIC to analyze the request, specifically addressing the contribution to academic and/or strategic plans, value added, and the budget and funding plan, including realism of external funding goals. The CIC, if consulted, will also consider whether the proposed Center name realistically and accurately reflects the scope of the mission, activities, and clientele of the Center.

Following analysis by the CIC, if consulted, the Vice Chancellor, or their designee, will make a determination that includes:

- whether the proposed Center should be further considered and under what conditions;
- 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.

If the Chancellor concurs with the determination to establish a new Center, they will designate the Vice Chancellor for Research to submit the recommendation for approval by the Board of Trustees, through the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee.

H. Management

1. Directors.

Center Directors are responsible for the day-to-day programmatic, fiscal, and personnel decisions of the Center and will hold a faculty appointment or a non-faculty EHRA appointment. Center Directors may be selected by one of the following means:

- a. If the proposed Director in the request for Authorization to Establish is a member of the University faculty or staff, the Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, may accept that proposed Director or, in consultation with the Dean or senior administrative officer, make an alternative selection from the faculty or staff; or
 - b. The Vice Chancellor for Research, or their designee, may appoint a search committee and charge it with the conduct of a national search, following established University procedures for the hiring of academic or administrative personnel.
2. Whether the Director's position is that of faculty or non-faculty EHRA, the appointment is made in accordance with existing policies and procedures for such appointments. In appointing the Director, the Vice Chancellor for Research will also designate the Dean or senior administrative officer to whom the Director is to report, and the Director will serve at the pleasure of the Dean or senior administrative officer. The Director, subject to the approval of the Dean or senior administrative officer, appoints associate or assistant directors.
 3. Each Center must have a web site displaying at a minimum the Center's name, primary designation (research, public service, instructional), Director's name and contact information, and a brief mission statement.
 4. **Center Boards or Committees.**
A Center may determine that an advisory or policy board or committee is needed. Boards or committees are particularly useful when the Center must coordinate efforts across departments, units, or institutions. Such boards or committees do not have the authority to make hiring offers to Directors or other staff. While boards or committees may make recommendations regarding the use of Center funds, such entities do not have the authority to access, use, or otherwise control funds associated with the Center.
 5. **Authority through Bylaws, MOUs, or other Governing Documents.**
Centers may address their mission and governance structure through bylaws, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), or other governing documents. Examples of decisions that can be localized at the Center level include processes for appointing and staggering terms of board members, requirements for adding new partners or partner campuses, or agreements

on leadership and logistics for specified collaborative initiatives.

6. Reports.

The Dean or senior administrative officer designee may request periodic reports, in addition to the annual reports indicated in Section J, from the Director that summarize Center activities and progress toward goals. Based on those reports and current strategic issues, the Dean or senior administrative officer designee and Director may agree on appropriate modifications to Center goals.

7. Chancellor.

The Chancellor or their designee must ensure that each Center or Institute is knowledgeable of IRC Section 501(c)(3) limits on lobbying. Annual compliance training must be delivered to the directors of all Centers and Institutes concerning Internal Revenue Code restrictions on political and legislative activities.

I. Special Strategic Initiatives

There may be instances, based on University strategic planning, in which the University establishes a Center (most likely an Institute) as a special strategic initiative. In such cases, the Chancellor may issue an Authorization to Plan to a Vice Chancellor or other University official, who would in turn appoint a planning committee. The Chancellor, or their designee, would then issue the Authorization to Establish, based on documentation prepared by the committee and following the guidelines of Sections F. and G. above. If approved by the Board of Trustees, the appointment of a Director would follow the guidelines in Section H., but the Provost would have the option of assigning the Institute to a senior academic officer other than a Dean, with the Director reporting to that official.

J. Evaluation of Centers and Center Directors

On an annual basis, each Center Director will submit a report of Center activity and performance to the appropriate supervising Dean or senior administrative officer. This report will be used by the Dean or senior administrative officer to make an annual evaluation of the Center and the Director.

The annual report will address specific issues based on the Center's initial or revised goals, including:

- Performance against specific objectives and goals;
- Quality and quantity of scholarly activity (as appropriate per mission), teaching and other instructional activity (as appropriate per mission), and service (as appropriate per mission);
- Sufficient budget to continue operation, including the amount and proportion of funds received from General Fund and non-General Fund sources as well as in kind support;
- Fiscal oversight;
- Analysis and assurance that the entity does not duplicate other institutional, UNC System, or State entities;
- Analysis and consideration as to whether the entity's work can be effectively accomplished by a single department or program; and
- Stakeholder feedback (stakeholder defined as appropriate per the unit's mission).

The evaluation of the Center Director will consider:

- Performance against individual objectives and goals;
- Feedback on leadership and communication from Center/Institute staff, partners and/or clients; and
- Management of fiscal and human resources.
- Standard practices and procedures for involving other UNC constituent institutions in review processes, when relevant;
- Articulation of the type of unsatisfactory performance that could merit condition for discontinuation of a Center, Institute, director, or others; and
- Clear plans for occasions when Centers, Institutes, or directors do not meet minimum review expectations, including process, milestones, and responsible parties.

On a periodic basis, Centers are also evaluated according to the follow process:

1. New Centers will receive an initial three-year charter.
2. At the end of Year 2, the Center will prepare a report in accordance with the accountability plan in G.8. above, summarizing the progress toward its goals, for review by the Dean or senior administrative officer.
3. Based on this review, the Dean or senior administrative officer will recommend to the Vice Chancellor for Research that the Center receive a two- year extension of their charter (to a total of five years) or that the Center be terminated at the end of the three-year charter.
4. The Vice Chancellor for Research may approve a two-year extension or may, in consultation with the Chancellor, recommend to the Board of Trustees that the Center be discontinued.

For Centers that receive an extension of their charter to five years, a full Center review and evaluation will take place in the fourth year. To initiate this process, the Vice Chancellor for Research will consult with the Dean or senior administrative officer and establish a timeline for the review. The Dean or senior administrative officer will then charge the Center Director with a self-evaluation, using a format that is customized to the Center and agreed upon by the Dean or senior administrative officer and the Director. The purpose of the self-evaluation will be to collect data related to the Center's goals and objectives, with specific attention to why the Center was established, as provided in section D. above, and to the accountability plan described in G.8., including any modifications to that plan.

When the Director completes the self-study, the Dean or senior administrative officer will select at least two objective persons (internal or external) who are able to review the self-study documents and deliver recommendations to the Dean or senior administrative officer. The Dean or senior administrative officer will then add their comments and recommendations to those of the reviewers and forward those documents to the Vice Chancellor, and if requested, for review by the CIC. If requested, the CIC review will address specific issues based on the Center's initial or revised goals, such as:

- Is current funding of the unit sufficient to continue its operation? Is the Center deriving a reasonable portion of its support from external sources?
- Is the Center providing access to unique facilities, instrumentation, or other resources?
- What is the Center's role in convening specific communities and engaging those

communities in center activities?

- Has the Center’s national or international prominence been sustained?
- Is student support and training consistent with the Center's stated goals and objectives? Do current operations duplicate the efforts of other units?
- Could the work of the Center be accomplished by a single department or program?
- Is the Center being managed effectively?
- Is the Center meeting the goals set forth in the establishing documents?

Review of these issues will inform the recommendation to continue or discontinue the Center. A Center or Institute may be discontinued for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- lack of fiscal resources for sustainability,
- termination of a supporting grant or award,
- lack of fit with departmental, college or institutional missions or objectives, or
- a change in institutional priorities.

Based on the CIC review (if requested) outcomes and in consultation with the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Research may extend the Center’s charter for an additional five years or recommend that the Center should be discontinued. The Vice Chancellor for Research will submit a recommendation to discontinue a Center to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, for action by the full Board.

Following Board action resulting in discontinuation of a Center, the Dean or senior administrative officer designee will work with the Center Director to ensure an orderly termination or transfer of contractual obligations and to seek alternative employment for full-time staff. The center “phase-out” should take no longer than one year.

For Centers whose charters are extended, evaluations will be conducted at five-year intervals pursuant to the procedures above.

K. Pilot Centers

A Dean or senior administrative officer may wish to establish a pilot center that meets certain needs within the college but does not yet meet the standard for creating a UNC Charlotte Institutional Center as set forth in Section D. In such cases, the pilot center may be established and incubated with college resources, but the name of the center must be preceded by the name of the college, e.g., *The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Center for the Study of Important Things*. This naming convention will allow one to distinguish between Institutional Centers and pilot centers, particularly on websites or letterheads, and to readily identify the particular college in which a pilot center is located.

Pilot centers may be established for an initial two-year period and, with appropriate review, extended to five years, but must then be proposed as an Institutional Center or be discontinued. Pilot centers that are to be proposed as Institutional Centers will be deemed to have received Authorization to Plan and may immediately request Authorization to Establish under the provisions of Section G. The Vice Chancellor for Research and the Provost must be informed when a pilot center is established.