

Process for the Conversion of a University-Wide Initiative/Center into a University-Wide Institute at Duke University

Office of the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies

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Duke University thrives on collaborative research, teaching, and civic engagement, much of which takes place across the boundaries of academic disciplines and schools. To facilitate such integrated inquiry, pedagogy, and outreach, Duke has created and sustained six university-wide interdisciplinary institutes, each of which receives core funding from the Office of the Provost and has deep connections to multiple schools. These include the Duke Institute for Brain Sciences, the Duke Global Health Institute, the Franklin Humanities Institute, the Kenan Institute for Ethics, the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, and the Social Science Research Institute (two of which—DIBS and DGHI—are jointly funded along with the Dean of the School of Medicine).¹

The Provost, in consultation with the Executive Committee of Academic Council, has determined that the time is right for Duke to have a more clearly articulated process for the conversion of a university-wide interdisciplinary initiative or center that already receives major funding from the Provost into a university-wide interdisciplinary institute. This document builds on discussions in APC in 2011 that focused on external reviews of existing institutes, and addresses:

- the initiation of the process to convert a pre-existing unit into a university-wide interdisciplinary institute;
- the criteria that faculty governance structures should consider in evaluating a specific proposal;
- the structure of any formal proposal to create an institute, as well as specific material for that proposal; and
- the process through which Duke’s governance structures would consider the proposal.

¹ As a point of clarification with regard to nomenclature – institutes, initiatives, and centers abound at Duke. Most reside within Schools. A much smaller number receive core funding from the Provost based on their cross-school mission and impact.

INITIATION OF THE CONVERSION PROCESS

The formal process described below can only be initiated by the Provost. It will not apply to the creation of centers, initiatives, or other such institutional mechanisms for testing out new intellectual directions or giving greater cohesion to ongoing efforts.

The Provost will only begin the process to convert a university-wide initiative or center into a university-wide institute after consultation with relevant Deans and academic leaders, and after an assessment that there is a viable financial plan for the organization. This decision must reflect a determination that the prospective institute has successfully built a durable interdisciplinary network that integrates the core university missions of excellent research, innovative teaching, and effective outreach, and that spans multiple schools and disciplines. Upon the invitation of the Provost, the unit in question will develop a formal proposal as described below.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING A PROPOSED CONVERSION TO INSTITUTE STATUS

Duke's established institutes all support research, teaching, and engagement beyond the walls of the university, although each has distinctive configurations of these three core elements of Duke's mission. A proposal for the conversion of an initiative or center into a university-wide institute should clearly articulate how it envisions integrating each of these core features. It should further convey its current impact within and outside the university, as well as its potential for deepening that impact. In doing so, such proposals should discuss the extent to which the unit in question has:

- **Achieved a critical mass of faculty engagement**, as reflected in breadth of faculty affiliation across multiple Duke schools and depth/impact of interdisciplinary research that has been facilitated by the initiative/center;
- **Attained a substantial educational footprint**, whether through creating a vibrant undergraduate program (as through a certificate, Bass Connections Theme, Focus Cluster, Duke Engage projects, major, and/or co-major), mentoring graduate and professional students from multiple disciplines and schools; and/or running interdisciplinary graduate programs;
- **Cultivated deep linkages to external partners and constituencies**; these linkages in most cases would include a track record of external funding and would reflect an external reputation for excellence;

- **Effectively partnered with core Duke units** – multiple schools, departments, and other institutes, where appropriate -- that show a commitment to integration rather than turf/silo creation;
- **Developed a robust plan for furthering Duke’s goals of diversity and inclusiveness** with regard to faculty, students, and staff, whether through recruitment of/professional development for faculty, investment in diversifying the population of students exploring relevant fields of inquiry, or otherwise;
- **Shown strategic significance for Duke** – a clear opportunity to: address insufficient intellectual infrastructure in a crucial arena of inquiry/teaching/outreach; or build on an emerging set of cross-school capacities/strengths; and
- **Identified opportunities to widen external fundraising** through the signaling of a more substantial university-wide commitment to the enterprise.

The threshold for institute-conversion is not unambiguous excellence with regard to each of these criteria, and evaluation of any proposal using the above list of criteria should not proceed simply as a box checking exercise. Instead, the evaluation process should focus on the extent to which a proposal presents a compelling vision for interdisciplinary inquiry, pedagogy, and outreach, as well as a track record of creative leadership, broad university participation, and most importantly, clear potential for further innovation and impact.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSAL FOR CONVERSION TO INSTITUTE STATUS

The proposal should include:

- 1) A brief narrative history of the organization;
- 2) A statement laying out the key rationales for the transition to institute status – whether about fundraising, capacity to fulfill key missions, leverage partnerships, deepen organizational leadership, or otherwise;
- 3) An overview of current organizational structure, faculty governance mechanisms, key programs, research projects, educational offerings, and outreach efforts;
- 4) An overview of participating faculty and students that conveys the span of the unit across schools;
- 5) A depiction of current space, any anticipated space needs with the shift in status, and a plan for meeting those needs;

- 6) A description of key research and teaching collaborations with Duke schools, departments, and institutes/initiatives, as well as other universities, where appropriate;
- 7) A description of key partnerships with external organizations other than universities;
- 8) An elaboration of the organization's plan to foster diversity/inclusiveness in participating faculty and students, as well as staff, with due regard to the constraints associated with the relevant fields of inquiry;
- 9) A comparison of the organization with other similar entities at other universities; and
- 10) An articulation of major goals in the arena of research, teaching and outreach over the subsequent three to five years.
- 11) A budgetary overview, indicating major areas of expenditure (staffing, research support, teaching) and sources of funding, along with any significant changes associated with the conversion to Institute status.

PROCESS

The proposal would be considered by the following governance structures:

- 1) If deemed appropriate by the Provost, the Global Priorities Committee or any other relevant provostial committee
- 2) In all cases, the University Priorities Committee, which will receive the proposal, and may request a discussion if the committee views the budgetary implications of the conversion process as warranting one;
- 3) In all cases, the Academic Programs Committee, with a vote on a formal resolution
- 4) In all cases, the Executive Committee of Academic Council
- 5) In all cases, the Academic Council, with a vote on a formal resolution
- 6) In all cases, the Duke Board of Trustees, with a vote on a formal resolution