

**Resolution 2016-2017-14 Guidelines for Academic Structure at the University of Central Florida**

**Whereas**, the University of Central Florida is now an emerging preeminent University in the State of Florida; and

**Whereas**, Interdisciplinary research has emerged as a driving force in the academe in recent years; and

**Whereas**, academic unit structure can enable stronger interdisciplinary research; and

**Whereas**, clear definitions will streamline the process for academic unit structure at UCF; and

**Whereas**, the attached Guidelines for Academic Structure at the University of Central Florida have been developed by Provost Fellows based on consultations with the administration and college deans; therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Faculty Senate supports the attached guidelines for academic unit definitions for institutionalization and to promote both traditional disciplinary academic units and the establishment of interdisciplinary academic unit structures.

*Approved by the Faculty Senate on January 26, 2017.*

**Guidelines for Academic Structure at the University of Central Florida**  
**Fall 2016** – Fernando Rivera and William Self  
(Provost Faculty Fellows: 2015-2016)

**Background**

Universities are complex and integrated institutions that at their core are founded upon the faculty that carry out the research and creative activities, engage in the teaching and learning enterprise, and serve both their discipline and the broader university community to build a strong institution. Shared governance relies on strong communication between the faculty and the administration, and therefore the organization of the academic units is key to how well faculty can function and leadership can govern. UCF has grown substantially in the past fifty years and expanded its academic and research units based largely on the strengths of the community and opportunities to expand in key areas such as optics, medicine, modeling and simulation, among others. This document is forward looking and should be viewed as a general set of guidelines for academic unit structure.

Interdisciplinary research has emerged as the driving force in science in recent years (Ledford, 2015). Creating academic structures that can facilitate interdisciplinary research has been the focus of many recent studies (Sa, 2008; Gumpert and Snyderman, 2002; King, 2010). A recent best practice report from the Education Advisory Board (EAB summary) wrestles with the issues of how to support faculty who are truly interdisciplinary through traditional academic structures, silos (departments and schools) within traditional colleges. Harvard University carried out an extensive self-study that led to the recommendation of inter-school departments (at Harvard, Schools are equivalent to colleges at UCF). This analysis, entitled “Enhancing Science and Engineering Education at Harvard” was derived from a shared governance study that informed a change in academic structure (UPCSE report, 2006).

The following guidelines for academic structure attempt to bring together best practice findings from outside of UCF, as well as an internal analysis from within UCF, to guide a foundation of principles for academic unit definitions. These definitions are based upon a core principal that an academic unit is rooted in the three-legged stool of teaching, research and service, and therefore is anchored with tenured and tenure track faculty. These definitions also recognize that supporting faculty including but not limited to: instructors, lecturers, research faculty and clinical faculty are key constituents to the faculty at a very high research institution. These guidelines should be viewed as recommendations when proposing to change existing or to create new academic units. Generally the process would be initiated by the Deans and/or the Provost and would include a proposal describing the rationale for a change in existing unit(s) or establishment of a new academic unit. The Office of the Provost and the Office of the President will have the ultimate authority and responsibility for any academic structuring or restructuring.

## **Departments**

An academic department is the basic administrative unit at the University to carry out the core missions of teaching, research and service. A department should have a general focus within a national or internationally recognized discipline. It is normally expected that a department would have both undergraduate and graduate education programs. A department should be housed within a single College or School, and have a Chair that serves as a leader who is responsible for the organization and function of the department. A department should consist of tenure-track or tenured faculty whose tenure is held within the department. Normally a department would be expected to have a critical mass of faculty in relation to the discipline and the ranks of the faculty should be balanced. With the Chair, the faculty within the department should have a role in governance of academic programs and curricula, departmental resources, and representation to the University community.

## **Colleges**

A college is an academic unit that consists of multiple departments as defined above. Academic departments should be within a focus or foci or be in line with national structures that are historical in nature (e.g. College of Arts and Sciences). Although the number of faculty is naturally defined by the number of departments, it would normally be expected that a college would consist of multiple academic units that each have a critical mass of disciplinary faculty. The college should be headed by a Dean who serves as a leader and is responsible for oversight of the organization to achieve the goals of the college and to spearhead the core missions of teaching, research and service. In the case of the College of Medicine this overall mission is Teaching, Research and Patient care.

## **Schools - Disciplinary (Intra-college)**

A disciplinary school is defined as a school that resides within a single college (intra-college structure). Some colleges by the nature of their diversity of disciplines could conceivably have a school that is interdisciplinary in nature but disciplinary (intra-college) in structure. A disciplinary school is, like a department, a unit at the University to carry out the core missions of teaching, research and service. A disciplinary school should have a focus within a national or internationally recognized discipline or closely related group of disciplines. It is normally expected that a disciplinary school would have both undergraduate and graduate education programs. The school should have a Director that serves as a leader who is responsible for the organization and function of the school. A school should consist of tenure-track or tenured faculty whose tenure is based within the school. Normally a disciplinary school would be expected to have significantly more faculty than an academic department, and the ranks of the faculty should be balanced. A school is different for a department as it carries a broader mission and its designation is not only a result of larger faculty numbers. A disciplinary school could have divisions and these divisions could mature into Departments. Schools may also develop academic research centers or house research centers or institutes. Divisions could be organized around research, teaching or service. A school could

have multiple academic programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level. With the Director, the faculty within the school should have a role in governance of academic programs and curricula, school resources, and representation to the University community.

## **Interdisciplinary Structures**

### **Interdisciplinary Academic Research Center**

An interdisciplinary academic research center is an organization of faculty that are derived from multiple existing academic units with shared research interests that hold tenure in an existing academic unit (department or school). In order to establish an interdisciplinary academic research center, faculty from multiple academic units must be integral to the mission of the center. This type of interdisciplinary center is likely to be formed from smaller interdisciplinary groups or units. Formation of a new interdisciplinary center requires approval through the Office of Academic Program Quality.

### **Schools – Interdisciplinary (inter-college)**

An interdisciplinary school is defined as a school that resides between two or more colleges (inter-college). An interdisciplinary school is, like a department, a unit at the University to carry out the core missions of teaching, research and service. An interdisciplinary school resides at the interface of several unique disciplines. It is normally expected that an interdisciplinary school would have both undergraduate and graduate education programs that have matured through an incubation period in either the College of Graduate studies or the College of Undergraduate studies (see process below). The school should have a Director that serves as a leader who is responsible for the organization and function of the school.

Because of the unique nature of an interdisciplinary school, having faculty who hold appointments and tenure in multiple colleges, the reporting structure for the Director of the School becomes a vital component to shared governance. All Colleges involved in the School will have representation on the Council. Generally, the school Director should report to a Council that consists of: 1) each of the college Deans involved in the school; and 2) an equal number of faculty representatives from the school. The school faculty will elect these faculty representatives in at large election regardless of the structure of the units within the school. Once elected, these faculty representatives on the council shall serve a two year term, and will be limited to two consecutive two year terms. Deans are not elected but are members de facto based on the faculty present within the School. Thus an equal number of faculty and Deans will oversee the leadership of the School.

The Chair of the council, one of the Deans on the council, will be elected by the council to a three-year term. This Chair will also serve as the primary contact between the council and the Director and will facilitate the annual evaluation of the Director. The Director, or a 2/3 majority vote of the faculty of the School can request a meeting of the council for any matter that needs attention of the council.

The school should consist of tenure-track or tenured faculty whose tenure is NOT based within the school but held in a disciplinary department or school. An interdisciplinary school has in general fewer faculty than a disciplinary school, especially early in its development, yet attempts to have some balance in the rank of faculty will again be important for a healthy unit. An interdisciplinary school could have multiple academic programs at either level, and as with a disciplinary school can house divisions, departments or centers with a broader mission than would be present in a typical academic department. With the Director, the faculty within the school should have a role in governance of academic programs and curricula, school resources, and representation to the University community.

### **Academic program development - Interdisciplinary**

The development of an academic program that resides between two or more established disciplines would normally be expected to proceed through a pilot period. This period allows for recruitment, development and expansion of a degree program, graduate or undergraduate, with direct oversight from the College of Graduate studies or the College of Undergraduate studies. For example, an interdisciplinary research center could develop an undergraduate program jointly with the College of Undergraduate studies over a period of time (likely 3-5 years), however the program would reside officially within the College of Undergraduate Studies. To move the program to the center would require the Center to mature into an Interdisciplinary School (above).

### **Literature cited:**

Ledford, Heidi (2015) "How to Solve the World's Biggest Problems" *Nature* (17 Sep 2015) 525: 308-11

Sa, Creso (2008) "'Interdisciplinary Strategies' in U.S. Research Universities," *Higher Education* 55: 537-552

Gumport, Patricia and Stuart Snyderman (2002) "The Formal Organization of Knowledge: An Analysis of Academic Structure," *The Journal of Higher Education* 73: 375-408

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Harvard University, *Enhancing Science and Engineering at Harvard* (Dec 2006)