

University Research Centers Application/Award/Operating Guidelines

Rationale (Overview)

Public and private funding agencies increasingly are focusing on finding solutions to interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary research problems that will have significant societal and/or economic impact. To assure Georgia State's competitiveness in addressing these critical challenges, the 2011 University strategic plan included the goal of establishing University Research Centers (URCs). The URCs support the development of solutions to significant societal problems and are built on interdisciplinary (research undertaken jointly by scholars from two or more distinct disciplines) and/or transdisciplinary (interdisciplinary research aimed at creating new conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and translational innovations that integrate and move beyond discipline-specific approaches) collaborations to address these challenges. URCs are developed with consideration of the university's strategic goals for growth in research around specific topic areas and existing strengths within the faculty.

URCs are founded on the premise of being a specific benefit to the development and support of a more robust and strategic set of university supported research activities. More specifically, URCs provide a key mechanism for advancing Georgia State's inter-/transdisciplinary and collaborative research agenda, funding growth, and establishing unique research training opportunities. URCs also provide a basis for increasing the University's competitiveness for sponsor-funded program project and center grants. The lifetime of the center may be limited by the time and financial commitment needed to complete a particular project or agenda, or by the strategic priority the University places on the URC's research focus. Therefore, designation as a URC may be changed at any time with reasonable justification.

URCs are administratively supported by the Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development (VPRED) and are distinguished from college level research centers (i.e., established and administered by their respective academic unit). URCs are designed to provide faculty-focused administrative support and operational efficiencies necessary to facilitate the translation of scholarship into grant applications, economic development activities, products and services. The URCs collaborate with colleges to facilitate the recruitment of accomplished research faculty and scientists and the highest quality students and postdoctoral fellows to conduct the research and scholarly activities of the center.

Georgia State's *URCs have a number of goals*, which are directly related to the quality and extent of their scholarship and research, and include, but are not limited to:

1. Engaging in collaborative/inter-transdisciplinary research activities.
2. Meeting the target goal for external grant and/or contract funding (VPRED with a set goal amount for external funding for each URC).
3. Performing quality, cutting-edge research and scholarship that leverages the unique faculty expertise and facilities available at Georgia State.
4. Addressing problems recognized as having important societal impact.
5. Engaging in center activities that reflect intellectually stimulating environment.
6. Attracting world-class research faculty and scientists, and the highest quality graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.
7. Translating research and scholarship into outcomes and/or grant applications with potential societal and/or economic impact.

General Guidelines for Establishing a Center

Initial Stage

Any college-level research center, area of focus, or group of faculty may consider establishing a new URC. Prior to developing a proposal to become a URC, the leadership team should meet with the VPRED to discuss their concept for a new center. The URC designation is intended to support the founding, development and growth of new research centers that have a strong potential for meeting the goals and expectations listed below.

1. Conduct scholarly research and have a research focus that is aligned with the University's strategic initiatives and goals.
2. Have the ability to address innovative research problems using inter-/transdisciplinary approaches that will have a significant societal and/or economic impact.
3. Have the potential to strengthen the University's "brand" and improve its academic and research reputation.
4. Have the potential to transform the University and allow it to be recognized as, or quickly become, a leading research program among its peer and aspirational-peer institutions.
5. Have the potential to raise and/or compete for external funds that will make the center fiscally self-sustainable.
6. Have the potential to recruit exceptional, world-class faculty and research scientists, and high-quality graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.
7. Have the potential to impact their fields on national and/or international levels.

Once the concept for a new URC has been vetted through and approved by the VPRED, the process of establishing a URC typically consists of two additional stages, a preliminary stage and a proposal submission stage.

Preliminary Stage: Initial Application

If the VPRED agrees that the concept is a viable one for a URC proposal, the team may then submit a preliminary application to the VPRED which is a brief narrative document that addresses the following expectations.

1. Describes the proposed center's alignment with the goals and priorities of the University's strategic plan (<https://www.gsu.edu/strategicplan/>).
2. Describes the proposed center's relationship with current academic units, identifying its "value added contributions" to those units and to the institution as a whole, with specific reference to using an inter-/transdisciplinary approach to the conduct of research.
3. Describes the potential for attracting center-specific research funding from external sources to provide evidence of fiscal sustainability.
4. Describes the composition of an advisory group that will help to identify and negotiate the variables impacting the proposed URC and its participating departments and colleges (e.g., research expenses, graduate student training, center dissolution, addressing milestone goals, etc.).
5. List of the appropriate deans, department chairs and/or institute directors that will support the proposal, including their commitments of funding, administrative assistance and of the participation of department faculty members in the proposed center (append letters of support or a single letter with all relevant signatures).
6. List of financial and other commitments that will be requested if the application for a new center is approved.

The application is then reviewed by the VPRED and the President in consultation with the Provost, the Senate Research Committee, the appropriate college deans, and, at the VPRED's discretion, an advisory panel, and a determination is made about approving the URC designation. The VPRED will notify the team about the decision about whether or not the application to become a URC can move forward.

Final Stage: Formal Proposal

Upon approval of the preliminary application, the team should then prepare and submit a formal proposal that should address the following:

1. A description of the existing combination of faculty expertise, research infrastructure, collaborations, and external factors that creates an optimum environment for the center's success in being able to meet the URC goals.
2. Justification that the proposed new activities, or an increase in existing activities, require the establishment of the proposed URC, including an explanation of why the proposed goals and activities cannot be accomplished within a traditional academic structure. This should include specific references to the center's proposed inter-/transdisciplinary approach to the conduct of research.
3. Vision and mission statements for the center.
4. Strategic and action plans for meeting the URC goals (listed above) and any additional goals specific to the center.
5. A list of the leaders and faculty that will initially populate the center.
6. A detailed description of the requested and committed resources from the University (departments, colleges, central administration) and, if required, from external partners. The timeline for access to the support should be included in a table and letters of commitment attached as appendices for all commitments except those from the central administration (which will be negotiated upon approval of the proposal).
7. A detailed budget describing the resources and personnel needed (and source of funds) for all programs and activities of the center for up to five years.
8. The proposed timeline for launching the center.
9. A strategic plan for attracting new funding that supports the inter-/transdisciplinary research and research training (e.g., graduate students and postdoctoral fellows) in the center.
10. Letters of support from the college deans and/or department chairs of the academic units participating in the center (Note: General support information can be included in funding commitment letters from the same entities).

Proposal Review

As part of the proposal review, the VPRED, in consultation with the Provost and the University Senate Research Committee, may constitute a committee or an advisory panel of experts in the area of the center's proposed focus. The committee / advisory panel will be charged with evaluating the center's proposal and ancillary materials to determine alignment with the University's strategic plan, the potential for cutting-edge research and the potential for innovation and/or other scholarly outcomes that will drive the economic impact and/or societal impact of the proposed center, and also the availability of the necessary internal support for the center (relevant deans and department chairs). The committee / advisory panel will provide a recommendation regarding establishment of the center to the VPRED. Based on the committee's/panel's recommendation and the University's strategic priorities, the President, Provost and VPRED will determine whether a new URC will be established. The VPRED will contact the leadership team of the proposed new center to share the final decision.

General Operating Guidelines for URCs

Center faculty will report primarily to their academic departments/colleges and the URC director should work with the VPRED, relevant college deans, and relevant department chairs when developing administrative and workload agreements for themselves, current faculty in the center and new faculty hires for the center. The hiring of new faculty that will be part of any URC will proceed only after prior discussion with and approval of the Provost, relevant college dean, relevant department chair, and the VPRED (also see the general operating principles below). The URC director is expected to engage center faculty in the following activities on which the center will be evaluated annually:

1. Develop/update the general vision and mission for the center.
2. Establish strategic and action plans for meeting the URC general goals (listed above) and any additional goals specific to the center.
3. Develop plans for establishing strategic research collaborations required to meet the URC goal to be inter-/transdisciplinary and collaborative.
4. Define the performance metrics for the center (general or specific).
5. Develop a strategy for obtaining the annual external funding needed to meet the goal set by the VPRED for center-level funded projects by the end of the third year of operation and beyond. This amount is established by the VPRED and is typically around \$3 million (based on a continuing 3-year average) and may vary based on the disciplinary area.

The URC will receive a basic operational budget from the Office of the VPRED for a period of three years to be used for the establishment of the center and general operation costs. The Office of the VPRED also will provide the URC with at least three years of business and administrative support to assist with developing basic operations and supporting pre- and post-award grant management and to support the following:

1. Hiring additional staff support for operations and growing needs of the URC.
2. Advertising, recruiting and hiring personnel for the center. URC faculty hires must first be approved by the relevant college dean, relevant department chair, the VPRED and Provost prior to beginning a search. The URC director will follow the standard hiring process practiced by the college/department to which the new faculty member will report academically and should involve the dean and department chair throughout the process.
3. Supporting the establishment and administration of financial accounts and developing annual financial and performance reports for the center.
4. Ensuring appropriate and adequate information technology support for the center.
5. Creating and maintaining a center website and developing a communications and public relations plan for the center, with guidance from the VPRED's office.
6. Purchasing research supplies, equipment and tools for the center.
7. Sponsoring center events / conferences that promote the center's reputation and showcase center faculty, trainees, and accomplishments.
8. Convening any internal and external advisory groups, as needed.
9. Engaging in other activities to move the center towards meeting its goals.

A University Research Center will follow these operational principles:

The center director and VPRED will include colleges/departments in discussions regarding Center operations to help ensure consistency in standards and agreements across the university.

1. The center will be managed operationally by the center director.
2. The center will reside administratively under the office of the VPRED and be guided by the VPRED who will collaborate with the center director, and appropriate college dean(s)

and department chair(s) as needed, to make decisions about the center that require central administrative input.

3. The Office of the VPRED will provide limited administrative support staff for a URC for at least three years. These staff are hired and administratively managed by the Office of the VPRED, although URCs may choose to use their own funds to hire additional support staff to support their own center activities as their needs grow.
4. Faculty will be hired through a faculty search process that includes the center, the academic dean, and the chair of the primary academic unit(s)/department(s). Faculty appointments will be made in both the center and the primary academic unit(s)/department(s), although faculty salaries will come from the academic units to which they report (Refer to GSU's Joint Appointment MOU).
5. Salaries for center faculty will be the responsibility of the primary academic unit to which they report up to the amount the institution is expected to provide. Supplemental salary will be covered by external grants to the faculty, or by other center funds at the discretion of the center director.
6. Faculty promotion and tenure decisions, as well as post tenure reviews, will be the responsibility of the academic dean and the chair of the primary academic unit/department with full participation of and input from the center director and any secondary academic unit/department. Applications for tenure will be reviewed, awarded and held in the primary academic unit (Refer to GSU Promotion & Tenure Policy).
7. Instruction (teaching) and service commitments for center faculty will be determined jointly by the academic dean, the chair of the primary academic unit(s)/department(s) and the center director using the college workload policy.
8. Graduate students in the URCs will be admitted and enrolled in their primary (degree granting) academic unit/department. The academic unit/department will have administrative responsibility for all aspects of the student's academic program. Graduate students are typically paid by their academic programs, but may receive graduate research assistantships through a URC should the center choose to use their funds for this purpose. Graduate stipends may also be paid from external grants to faculty mentors at some point in their training in line with standard expectations of the academic unit/department. Graduate students are expected to be an integral part of the inter-/transdisciplinary collaborative research activities that are the focus of the center and to participate in other center activities (e.g., seminars, poster sessions, trainings, publications). As such, it is encouraged that graduate students in URCs benefit from input from multiple faculty during their education, with one primary research mentor.
9. Postdoctoral fellows in the URCs will have their primary appointment in the center. The center will have administrative responsibility for all aspects of the fellow's research programs and professional development. Postdoctoral fellows are expected to be an integral part of the inter-/transdisciplinary collaborative research activities that are a focus of the center and to participate in other center activities (e.g., seminars, poster sessions, trainings, publications). As such, it is encouraged that postdoctoral fellows in URCs benefit from input from multiple faculty during their fellowship, with one primary research mentor.
10. Research staff (e.g., research scientists, research associates) will be hired and administratively managed within the center.
11. Postdoctoral trainees and other staff hired specifically to work on center research projects and activities are fully the responsibility of the URC faculty member to whom they report.
12. Space for the center will be allocated, developed and managed collaboratively by the URC director, the affiliated colleges, and the Office of the VPRED.
13. Sharing of the academic unit's portion of F&A (indirect cost) funds derived

from center-funded grant awards will be determined using the standard F&A Split Agreement form at the proposal stage and will be routed to and signed off on by the center director, affiliated college dean(s), and department chairs. At the time of award, this may be re-negotiated and changed with a revised F&A Split Agreement Form signed by the center director, affiliated dean(s), and department chairs, as is the current standard practice for all F&A split agreements.

Annual Report Requirement

University Research Centers are required to submit an annual report detailing the following:

1. General vision and mission for the center.
2. List of the center's core faculty, students and postdoc trainees.
3. A description of the Center's progress over the past year towards meeting the URC goals (listed earlier in this document) and any additional center-specific goals and performance metrics.
4. Strategic and action plans for the coming year for meeting the URC goals (listed earlier in this document) and any center-specific goals and performance metrics.
5. List /describe the center's seminal accomplishments (those that set the center above peers and could lead to regional/national prominence in the field of research).
6. List of sponsored awards obtained for center-level research (should equal or surpass the annual funding goal specified by the VPRED for the URC in center-level funded projects, direct plus indirect costs, by the end of the third year of operation and beyond, based on a continuing 3-year average).
7. List of center publications (interdisciplinary and collaborative publications). Highlight the names of center students and postdoc trainees on center publications and note any individual honors/awards that set them apart from their peers within the field.

Guidelines for the Continuation/Renewal of Center Status

Annual Reviews

On a yearly basis, the Office of the VPRED will review the University Research Center's progress toward meeting its goals as outlined in the center's initial proposal for the first year, and in each annual report thereafter. Based on the reviews, the VPRED may meet with the center director to implement a plan for improvement for any of the reported activities.

Third-year Review

As part of the third-year review, the VPRED will review the annual reports from the first three years and any additional information that the URC director would like to provide highlighting center accomplishments related to the URC goals. URCs are expected to meet the URC goals (listed above) and consistently engage in center defined strategic activities. In addition, URCs are expected to be financially self-sufficient by the end of their third (3rd) year of operation (i.e., covering their own operating costs from F&A and any other revenue they may generate). The VPRED, in consultation with the President and Provost, will determine the center's continuation status following the third-year review. The center director will receive feedback from the VPRED regarding the center's progress and, if needed, guidance for improvements. The URC designation may be revoked if the URC is not meeting the URC goals by the end of their third year of operation.

Fifth-year Review

By the end of the fifth (5th) year of operation, URCs are expected to consistently meet their strategic goals and the annual funding goal. At this time, the VPRED will conduct a

comprehensive assessment of the URC's achievements. The VPRED, in consultation with the University Senate Research Committee, will appoint a panel to review the center's performance to date and provide recommendations. The fifth-year assessment will evaluate the center's original proposal and ancillary materials (e.g., annual reports) to determine their alignment with the objectives of the University's strategic plan, the center's past and future potential cutting-edge contributions, and past and future potential for innovation and/or other scholarly outcomes that drive economic impact and/or societal impact. In addition, the evaluation will assess the center's ability to maintain its financial requirements in the future. Based on the recommendations from the assessment and the current strategic priorities of the University, the President, Provost and VPRED will determine the center's continuation status as a University Research Center.

URCs that are approved to continue beyond the fifth year will be expected to continue providing annual reports demonstrating that they meet the URC goals including the annual funding goal, meet their own strategic goals, and remain aligned with the University's strategic priorities. Basic staff support provided by the Office of the VPRED may continue to be provided beyond year five at the discretion of the VPRED in consultation with the center director.

(Approved: Senate Research Committee, March 19, 2012)

(Revised: Senate Research Committee, December 4, 2020)