

**University of New England**  
**Policy on Academic Centers and Institutes at UNE**  
**Office of the Provost November 2018**

**Introduction**

Colleges and universities typically have academic centers and institutes in addition to traditional academic departments, programs and schools. These are distinct from support functions that may also be called centers (e.g., recreational center, tutoring center, career planning center) or which may also be used describe a physical location or building (e.g., dining center, performing arts center).

Academic centers and institutes typically are formed to organize a specific, focused teaching or research activity that is distinct from what is provided by the academic departments, schools and programs which are more focused on curriculum and arranged by traditional undergraduate or graduate disciplines. The most common rationale for forming a new center is to bring together a group of faculty across disciplines to work collaboratively on a focused project or topic that is outside the normal disciplinary structure (e.g., a center for drug addiction) or that provides academic support and resources that assist faculty and students across the institution (e.g., a center for teaching and learning).

Many centers and institutes are launched based on specific funding such as a major grant or gift, and may exist solely for the lifetime of that funding, or may transition after that funding to a more institutionally supported, sustainable model. Unlike departments and schools that are more permanent and based on ongoing curricular needs, centers and institutes normally are reviewed on a regular basis and may be phased out, discontinued, or changed in their structure and/or title over time as the needs of the institution change or the center reaches the end of its funding, natural project-based lifetime or relevance.

**Rationale**

The University of New England (UNE) has a number of research centers and institutes and, as at most institutions, these were developed *ad hoc* by one or more faculty based on grant funding or a specific collaborative opportunity. However, this can create a very heterogeneous and uneven landscape of units that are all organized, managed and funded based on different models. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent set of basic guidelines for defining centers and institutes, provide a process for their approval, creation and establishment, provide policies and procedures for their ongoing support and their periodic review, and create a framework for their oversight and management.

Academic centers and institutes typically focus on research, scholarship and outreach, rather than the curriculum-based academic focus of colleges, schools and departments. At UNE, centers and institutes do not have their own independent faculty lines; a faculty member with a primary appointment in a college and academic department may also be a member of one or more UNE centers and institutes as “added value” to their academic appointment, typically to enhance their scholarship and collaborative opportunities. Likewise, at UNE, centers and institutes do not have

independent courses or curricula; a center or institute may collaborate with one or more academic departments to develop and support curricula, but any proposed credit-bearing courses, certificates or other academic credentialing will require primary sponsorship and hosting by a UNE college and one or more of its academic departments, and will be listed in the course catalog through that department(s), as well as cross-listing.

The terms “center” and “institute” are often used interchangeably in higher education. However, in general a center is usually considered a smaller unit focused on a very specific and narrow scholarship area, whereas an institute is usually considered a much larger and more complex structure. A simple definition of an institute that illustrates the difference is that many institutes contain a collection of centers that are distinct in individual focus (and funding) but which share a common theme that links them in the umbrella organization. Some independent research organizations are named institutes, for example, and their individual research units within them are named centers rather than departments. Like many colleges and universities, UNE’s current centers are a mix of different structures. While most of the existing units at UNE will be grandfathered with respect to their naming and structure, going forward it will be useful and less confusing to follow the formal definitions of a center and institute as outlined above and below for any newly proposed endeavors, and some centers may be reviewed as to their naming and structure as part of the current strategic planning process.

For reference, a list of the current non-academic and academic centers and institutes at the UNE is presented below.

**UNE Non-Academic Support Centers and Physical Centers:**

- The George and Barbara Bush Center
- Student Access Center
- Arthur P. Girard Marine Science Center
- Student Counseling Center
- Student Academic Success Center
- Student Health Center
- Interprofessional Simulation and Innovation Center
- Clinical Performance Center
- Finley Recreation Center
- New England Osteopathic Heritage Center
- Campus Center
- Oral Health Center
- Dallaire Drug Information Center
- Maine Area Health Education Center
- Maine Geriatric Education Center
- Community Therapy Center
- Harold Alfond Center for Health Sciences
- Center for the Enrichment of Teaching and Learning

**UNE Academic Centers and Institutes:**

- Center for Global Humanities

- Center for Excellence in Aging and Health
- School of Marine Programs (formerly the Center for Excellence in Marine Sciences)
- Center for Excellence in Health Innovation
- Center for Excellence in the Neurosciences
- UNE North: The UNE Institute for North Atlantic Studies

### **Establishment of a New Center or Institute**

Naming and creating a new academic center or institute at UNE requires review and approval by the Provost's Office and formal approval by the President. Given their non-departmental and interdisciplinary basis, and ideally a mission that includes a more university-wide perspective for participation and impact, centers and institutes will normally report to the Provost's Office (formally via the office of the Associate Provost for Research and Scholarship) through their directors. However, the Provost may also designate a dean or Associate Provost to provide oversight on behalf of the Provost's Office for specific centers that are more focused within one college or a similarly narrower focus area.

When considering the creation of a new center or institute at UNE, in general the following definitions should be applied:

**Center:** A center is normally structured as a collaborative, interdisciplinary unit with faculty, staff and others participants from more than one discipline, department or school, and is focused on a specific area that is not normally covered by a single discipline or by an existing traditional academic unit on campus. Centers are often launched with specific funding such as a major individual or program project grant that supports the interdisciplinary activities of multiple scholars who serve as its core members. Most academic centers are soft-money funded (external grants and contracts) or supported by a combination of soft-money and institutional funding. Centers normally have a director who is a full-time faculty member in one of the university's academic units and who is compensated in some way to provide dedicated leadership support and representation. Larger centers may have one or more associate directors, and may have dedicated support staff funded by soft-money support. Centers should have a well-developed business plan for both initial and sustainable funding and operation. Centers that continue beyond the life of an initial short grant (normally 3-5 years) should have an external advisory committee and should be periodically reviewed (normally every five years) by the Provost's Office, which will provide a report to the President and a recommendation regarding continued support. Centers may have a physical home if they are large enough or if they require new or specialized space (e.g., a scientific research center) but many centers may be paper centers.

**Institute:** An institute is normally a larger and more permanent structure than a center, and normally is comprised of a collection of two or more centers with distinct areas of focus but a common theme linking them within the institute structure. The goal of the institute is to organize and synergize these areas of common theme or interest, as compared to a collection of stand-alone centers with distinct and non-overlapping areas of focus. As such, normally institutes are not created *de novo* but evolve from one or more existing centers when they reach a level of maturity and stability that warrants forming the larger parent structure.

The institute will have a director (often a full-time position) and normally will have one or more associate directors, who may also be directors of one of the institute's component centers. The institute may serve as the umbrella organization for major grants, contracts and gifts that support its overall and component missions. Each of its centers may have its own structure and support within the larger organization. Institutes normally have a physical home for, at a minimum, the institute office and its director and support staff, but its component units may have associated space or exist as paper centers within the institute. Institutes should have a well-developed business plan for sustainable funding and operation of the institute and its centers beyond the funding lifecycle of the component centers, but individual component centers may come and go over time depending on funding and focus.

Institutes must have a well-developed governance structure including a required external advisory committee that meets at least annually and whose chair will provide a report to the Provost and President on an annual basis. Institutes and their component centers and other units must be periodically reviewed (normally every five years) by the Provost's Office in conjunction with the institute's external advisory committee and other ad hoc outside reviewers, and this review group will provide a report to the President and a recommendation regarding continued direction and support.

### **Proposing a New Center or Institute**

To propose a new center or institute and have it be approved, proponents are strongly encouraged to discuss the idea with their dean(s) and the Provost beforehand. If there is support for the concept, please provide the following information and a cover letter outlining the intent and rationale for the new unit to the Provost's Office.

- Name of center or institute
- Director, time commitment and support mechanisms
- Initial faculty and professional staff memberships and their roles
- Other stakeholders and their roles
- Detailed business plan including all proposed support for Year One and for out-years
- Location of center or institute (if it requires a physical home) and space needs
- Mission and Vision statements
- Rationale for formation of the unit and its need or added value at the university
- Short- and long-term goals
- Added value to UNE, the region and the state
- Overlap or synergies with existing departments, centers and other units at UNE or the region
- Proposed lifetime, and proposed transition to sustainable funding if initially gift-, grant- or seed-funded