

Guidelines for Institutes, Centers, and Laboratories at UTHealth Houston

I. Overview and General Statement

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston ("University") encourages collaborative efforts among faculty to enhance its mission and goals. To that end, the university enables programs, divisions, departments, schools, other organizational entities and the university itself to establish collaborative units for activities that complement and/or enhance its missions of education, research, patient care, and public service. Such units are most often formed to conduct activities that require or are enhanced by interdisciplinary collaborations but in some cases may be established to enable activities that require highly specialized equipment and/or expertise not available in individual schools, departments, or divisions. Such units are most commonly referred to as institutes, centers, or laboratories, may be proposed and reviewed through the processes outlined below, and must operate within these guidelines.

II. Descriptions

Institutes, centers, and laboratories are commonly described as follows. Flexibility is allowed in the naming conventions as appropriate to best convey the purpose, functions, and scope of a unit.

1. Institute

A major unit that performs, coordinates and/or promotes research, education, patient care, and/or public service activities on a continuing basis over a broad area that often extends across schools, campus and/or institutional boundaries. The unit may involve partnerships with non-university entities such as hospital partners or government agencies. Because of their typical size and breadth, institutes will most often be organized at the university level, and the President or designee will have responsibility for institutional oversight. A unit that conducts activities involving multiple departments or divisions of a single school may also be designated an institute with the approval of the President.

2. Center

A unit that conducts research, education, patient care, and/or public service in a designated field that requires interdisciplinary participation or is established primarily to provide facilities, expertise and/or administrative support services for the work of programs, departments or other organizational units of the university. A university center involves more than one school or unit of the university, and a school-based center involves multiple departments or operating units of a single school. A department-based center typically has the majority of the efforts based within a single department. The President or designee will have responsibility for institutional oversight of a university center, the relevant Dean or designee will have responsibility for a school-based center, and the relevant department chair or designee will have responsibility for a department-based center.

3. Laboratory

A unit that establishes and maintains facilities for research, education, patient care, and/or public service, often with the help of designated staff appointed in accordance with university policies. The President or designee will generally have

responsibility for a laboratory that supports the work of faculty from multiple schools, and a Dean or designee will generally have responsibility for a laboratory that supports the work of faculty members primarily from a single school. The relevant department chair or designee will have responsibility for a laboratory that supports the work of faculty members primarily from a single department.

Separate guidelines have been established for the approval and operations of [research service centers and traditional “Core Laboratories”](https://www.uth.edu/research/research-service-centers.htm) that provide specialized research services to the university community (<https://www.uth.edu/research/research-service-centers.htm>).

The primary functions of university, school and department institutes, centers, and laboratories are to conduct and/or support the University’s missions of research, education, clinical care and public service, especially those that are interdisciplinary or highly specialized in nature. Additional functions may include:

- disseminating information through conferences, meetings, and other activities;
- providing intramural or extramural training opportunities and access to facilities for observers, visiting students, professional trainees and collaborators from other institutions and organizations as well as the University’s faculty, students, and trainees; and
- obtaining extramural funds.

The designation of an institute, center, laboratory or other organizational or administrative unit at the University will refer only to an entity devoted primarily to a non-profit activity engaging faculty, students, trainees, staff and colleagues in activities related to the missions of the university.

In all cases, institutes, centers, laboratories, and other organizational or administrative units at the University are subject to all policies and procedures of the University and the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System and may be subject to reporting and auditing requirements.

Institutes, centers, and laboratories may not offer a degree or certificate program requiring Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approval unless they are included on the THECB’s Inventory of Institutional Administrative Structures. Faculty members of these units may participate in teaching in THECB approved degree and/or certificate programs of University schools (see Section III.C. Faculty Membership below).

If an institute, center, or laboratory wishes to establish an advisory committee/council, the establishment must be in accordance with the Regents’ Rules and Regulations, Series 60302.

III. Process and Procedures

A. Establishment

1. University Units

Proposals for the establishment of a university institute, center, or laboratory (collectively referred to as “the unit”) must be made by a Dean or other designee and submitted to the

President for approval. Applicants must seek preliminary approval from the President or designee for the establishment of university units. Once preliminary approval is granted, a written proposal must be developed that includes the following information:

- a. The proposed name of the unit;
- b. The purpose of the unit and how it will support and/or enhance the mission and goals of the university;
- c. The organizational and governance structure for the proposed unit, including a list of the head/director and others with significant administrative and management responsibilities;
- d. A description of the initial and any anticipated future activities, programs, and functions of the unit;
- e. A description of space needs and the commitments for their provision;
- f. A proposed five-year budget and source(s) of support for start-up funding, commitments and anticipated sources of support for ongoing support, and a plan to achieve sustainable funding;
- g. Criteria and eligibility for faculty membership, the appointment process, expectations for participation and a statement specifying periodic review for continued appointment;
- h. A list of participating faculty members; and
- i. Any potential overlap or duplication of purposes and functions of the proposed unit with other university or school departments, divisions, or operating units.

Proposals shall be submitted to the Senior Vice President of Academic and Faculty Affairs (SVPAFA) who will distribute the proposal to the University Executive Council and other leadership groups as appropriate for comment. The sponsor may consider these comments for possible modifications of the initial proposal.

After comments and any revisions by the sponsor, the SVPAFA will submit the final proposal to the University Executive Council for consideration and a recommendation to the President who will make the final decision. A list of all university institutes, centers, and laboratories shall be maintained by the [University](#).

2. School Units

Proposals for school-based centers or laboratories will be submitted to the Dean of the appropriate school and should include information comparable to that for university-based units in Section III.A.1 above, including how the proposed unit would support and/or enhance the mission and goals of the school as well as those of the University if applicable. Proposals will receive an initial review by the Dean to determine if they should be considered further. Proposals approved for consideration by the Dean should be distributed for comment to appropriate departments and units within the school as determined by the Dean. The sponsor may consider these comments for possible modifications of the initial proposal.

Following the internal school-based review, the Dean shall make a final decision whether to approve the proposal. If approved, the Dean will provide a copy of the proposal to the SVPAFA, who will distribute it to the University Executive Council for comments, which the Dean may consider for possible modifications of the proposal.

3. Department Units

Proposals for department-based centers or laboratories will be submitted to the relevant department chair or designee and should include information comparable to that for university-based units in Section III.A.1 above, including how the proposed unit would support and/or enhance the mission and goals of the department as well as those of the school and the University if applicable. Proposals will receive an initial review by the department chair or designee to determine if they should be considered further.

Proposals approved for consideration by the department chair or designee should be distributed for comment as appropriate within the department as determined by the department chair or designee. The sponsor may consider these comments for possible modifications of the initial proposal.

Following the internal department-based review, the Dean shall make a final decision whether to approve the proposal.

B. Naming, Branding, and Marketing

All naming, logo design and marketing strategies for all institutes, centers, and laboratories (university-based, school-based and department-based) must be approved by the University's Office of Marketing and Communications (713-500-2806).

Proposals to name an institute, center, or laboratory for an individual or non-university entity must comply with [HOOP Policy 65 Naming Policy](#).

C. Faculty Membership

Prior to receiving an appointment in a university, school or department institute, center, or laboratory, a faculty member must have an academic appointment in a department of a University school.

Recommendations for initial faculty appointments, promotions, and tenure (if applicable) must originate from the department(s) in which the faculty appointment is being proposed or in which the current faculty member holds an academic appointment. Requests for appointments, promotions, and tenure shall follow established department, school, and university processes.

The department chair(s) shall have overall responsibility for a faculty member's assignments and evaluations. Assignments for work within an institute, center or laboratory and any related salary support, space, or other resources must be mutually agreed upon by the department chair(s) and the head/director of the relevant unit.

D. Review of Unit

Institutes, centers, and laboratories will be reviewed at least every five years. A launch review is conducted approximately 12 months following formal approval and is focused on the initial establishment and early progress of the unit. *Ad hoc* reviews may also be conducted as determined by the President, Dean or designee.

Each unit undergoing review must prepare a written self-study appropriate to the type of review. The self-study should address, as applicable, the unit's mission and goals, organizational structure, scholarly and programmatic activities, funding and resource utilization, with plans for sustainability, and future plans.

The appropriate reviewing authority will appoint a review committee or designee(s) to evaluate the self-study and any additional materials. The review will result in a written report summarizing findings and providing recommendations regarding the unit's continuation and any required actions.

Possible review outcomes include:

- Continuation without modification
- Continuation with suggested or required modifications
- Probationary continuation with a required follow-up review
- Phase-out or discontinuation

The unit director(s) will be provided an opportunity to respond in writing to the review findings and recommendations. Detailed guidance on the preparation of self-studies and the format of review outcome memoranda is provided in the Appendices. Following completion of the review, the President, Dean or designee will provide a brief written executive response addressing the review findings and recommendations.

Appendix A. Self-Study Template

The length and level of detail of the self-study should be appropriate to the review type (1- or 5-year), with newer units providing shorter, progress-focused responses.

1. Executive Summary
 - Current mission and vision
 - Summary of major accomplishments and challenges
 - Notable changes since establishment or last review
2. Organization and Personnel
 - Leadership structure and governance
 - Faculty participation and growth
 - Staff and administrative support
3. Goals, Metrics, and Progress
 - Summary of approved goals and success metrics
 - Progress toward goals, including explanations for unmet objectives
 - Updated or revised metrics, if applicable
4. Academic and Programmatic Output
 - Scholarly output attributable to the unit (e.g., publications, grants)
 - Educational, training, or outreach activities
 - Contributions to interdisciplinary collaboration and institutional visibility
5. Resources and Sustainability (*using budget template linked here*)
 - Operating budget, current funding sources, and use of institutional resources
 - Assessment and plans for financial independence and plans for future sustainability
 - Space and shared resource utilization, as applicable
6. Future Direction and Strategic Alignment
 - Three-to-five-year vision and priorities with specific goals and metrics
 - Alignment with University and school strategic plans
 - SWOT Analysis: Assessment of the center or institute's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, including risks related to funding, operations, and long-term sustainability.
7. Appendices (*as applicable*)
 - Publication and grant lists
 - Organizational Chart
 - Evidence of scholarly/dissemination activities such as presentations, workshops, and symposia (flyers, slides, etc.).

Appendix B. Review Outcome Memorandum Template

To: [SVPAFA/SVPRSI]/[Dean]/[Chair]

From: [Review committee or Designee]

Subject: Review of [Center/Institute/Laboratory Name]

A. Summary of Review Brief description of the review scope, materials reviewed, and process.

B. Key Findings

- Mission relevance and alignment
- Achievement of stated goals and metrics
- Academic and programmatic impact
- Leadership and governance effectiveness
- Financial stewardship and sustainability

C. Strengths - Concise summary of major strengths and contributions.

D. Areas of Improvement - Identified gaps, risks, or concerns.

E. Recommendation

- ☐ Continuation without modification
- ☐ Continuation with required modifications
- ☐ Probationary continuation with a required follow-up review
- ☐ Phase-out or discontinuation

F. Required Actions (if applicable) – Specific actions and timelines.

<Signatures (Review Committee)>

G. Response from the Institute/Center/Laboratory Directors