Faculty Cluster Initiative: Request for Proposals (updated April. 23, 2015, modifications in yellow)

Included in the University of Central Florida’s five goals is achieving international prominence in research and key programs of graduate study and strengthening undergraduate programs. To help realize these goals, we must establish new models of research, teaching, and learning that blur the boundaries of traditional disciplines to allow for discovery in critical areas of excellence that reflect UCF’s academic priorities and enhance our unique potential for impact.

The new Faculty Cluster Initiative is designed to foster the development of strong, interdisciplinary, diverse teams focused on solving today’s most challenging scientific and societal problems based on our institutional strengths. These areas of focus, developed by faculty with support from department chairs, directors, deans, and the Vice President for Research and Commercialization, should advance knowledge at the intersection of traditional disciplines through transformative, large-scale collaborative efforts in research and teaching. Clusters are expected to be locally relevant with both national and international impact; innovative; timely; fill a gap or supplement existing programs; and build upon existing strengths to develop a critical mass of skills and make us uniquely strong. We envision the hiring of three to five additional highly promising faculty at any rank, per cluster. Individuals comprising the cluster should have diverse backgrounds (disciplines, funding availability, life experiences, etc.), and each individual must contribute their own unique expertise to the intellectual core of the cluster leading to innovative and transformative outcomes. We encourage cluster proposals from all areas of the University.

**UCF leadership is seeking faculty to help define areas of excellence in the upcoming academic year.**

As such, the Faculty Cluster Initiative has been integrated into UCF’s anticipated hiring plan for 100 new tenure-earning and tenured lines in 2016-17. Of these new positions, approximately 30 to 50 are expected to be cluster hires to complement existing faculty and work with them in interdisciplinary teams. The Office of the Provost will provide 100 percent of the cluster faculty salary lines and 65 percent of the start-up costs. Colleges, departments, and institutions will be expected to cover the remaining 35 percent start-up costs for these positions. Research indicates the “glue” that sustains clusters is funding among team members.

Faculty groups are encouraged to develop proposals for academic clusters based upon the following considerations:

- Ability to achieve national or international preeminence in proposed cluster area;
- Evidence-based impact for the interdisciplinary area of proposed excellence;
• Demonstration of the need for multiple, complementary disciplinary perspectives and expertise;
• Ability to strengthen the preparation of our students;
• Potential to build on existing strengths at UCF;
• Ability to attract new and sustainable/recurring funding from diverse sectors that is commensurate with focus area;
• Commitment to share resources and physical infrastructure;
• Inclusion of multiple colleges or, if within a college, a clear statement of value-added impact across the college’s departments;
• Demonstration of a balanced hiring plan that includes a strategic vision for attracting diverse faculty (ethnicity, gender, rank, diverse life experiences, etc.); and
• A clearly articulated organizational leadership plan.

Application Process

Please note: An informational session will be held at 3 p.m. on January 14, 2015 in Room TA 117.

This Request for Proposals follows a three-step process: (1) A pre-proposal; (2) an in-person presentation and interview; and (3) a workshop and expanded proposal for those selected.

Pre-proposals and subsequent invited proposals will be vetted by an evaluation panel of diverse faculty and administrative representatives from colleges and a select group of external stakeholders, co-chaired by the UCF Provost Faculty Fellows. Please note that an invitation to submit a proposal does not guarantee that the cluster will be selected for funding. Additionally, if you have a cluster idea, we strongly suggest that you start a conversation with the administrators who would support the cluster (chairs, directors, deans, and/or Vice President for Research and Commercialization), as their participation and support in the proposal is paramount.

Pre-proposal Format:

• The pre-proposal can be no more than four single-spaced pages, 12-point font with 1-inch margins, and include the following:
  o Name of cluster;
  o Cluster leader (no more than two names);
  o Participating UCF faculty;
  o Short- and long-term cluster objectives;
  o Description of the alignment between cluster objectives and department/institute/center, college, and university strategic priorities;
  o An evidence-based impact statement;
  o A graduate and undergraduate curriculum statement; and
o A proposed hiring plan (Detail specific areas and faculty ranks, but do not include the names of targeted individuals).

- An appendix consisting of no more than three single-spaced pages should summarize relevant prior or current grant funding and/or scholarly activity demonstrating the trajectory for the cluster, and plans for development or strengthening of undergraduate and/or graduate programs and curricula.

- Pre-proposals should be accompanied by two joint letters of support written and signed by: (1) The relevant chairs and/or directors, and (2) the participating college deans or the Vice President for Research and Commercialization.
  o The joint letter from the chairs/directors should explicitly address the department or school’s interdisciplinary collaboration readiness – defined as its commitment to accepting and fairly evaluating the scholarship of faculty on the edges of, and/or crossing over traditional disciplinary boundaries, as well as its support of the interdisciplinary curricula associated with the cluster.
  o The joint letter from the deans and/or vice president should address why they support this cluster, a financial commitment to 35 percent of the cluster start-up cost, and include any departmental contribution and a plan for potentially shared space.
  o It is important that at least one (if not both) of the joint letters detail the plan for shared administrative support for the cluster (IT support, travel, purchasing, etc.).

Pre-proposals must be emailed to facultycluster@ucf.edu by 5 p.m. February 20, 2015. The pre-proposal documents should consist of two separate PDF files (1. proposal, 2. letters; please differentiate the two files with _proposal or _letters in the name).

Two rounds of evaluation will occur during the pre-proposal stage. The initial round will be based on the written pre-proposal. Successful first-round pre-proposal teams will be notified by March 18, 2015 and, we estimate, to be invited to give a 5-minute oral presentation followed by 5 minutes of questions and answers from the evaluation panel on April 3, 2015.

Successful pre-proposal applicants will be notified by April 10, 2015 and provided with feedback to help in the preparation of their full proposals. There will be a workshop from 3-5 p.m. on April 22, 2015 in Room HEC 101 for all finalists to help them prepare the final proposal.

Final Proposal Format:

- The final proposal can be no more than 10 single-spaced pages, 12-point font and 1-inch margins, and will include all the elements requested in the pre-proposal, in addition to detailed plans on how the cluster will achieve the following:
  o National or international prominence;
increase scholarly and creative works that can help address challenging scientific and societal problems facing us in the coming century;
- Enhance research capacity to develop a robust, diverse, and recurring funding base;
- Ensure an increase in interdisciplinary publications reaching multiple disciplines; and
- Strengthen the undergraduate and/or graduate education mission at UCF.

- A revised appendix of up to four pages.

- A BioSketch for each UCF core cluster faculty member (Use provided template, does not count toward page limits).

- Original or revised letters of support from relevant chairs/directors/college deans/vice president (limited to 2 pages of text; plus a signature page)
  - The joint letter of support from the department chairs/school directors should indicate a discussion with the department/school faculty and their faculty’s interest in participating in the hiring process and willingness to learn to evaluate scholarship outside the department’s normal expectations. This letter also should clearly explain the relevance of the hire to departmental strategic priorities and include rationale for curriculum supported by cluster (limited to 2 pages of text; plus a signature page).
  - The joint letter of support from the deans and/or Vice President for Research and Commercialization should elaborate on a plan for supplying the cluster start-up requirements, including core infrastructure and equipment needs. This letter should also include potential shared space and pooling of start-up support, along with a space plan elaborating the likely space needs for the cluster and how these needs might be met by the sponsoring colleges and departments. Where space needs cannot be met, the department and the college should detail the amount and kind of space required and why the need cannot be met (limited to 2 pages of text; plus a signature page).

Final proposals must be emailed to facultycluster@ucf.edu by 5 p.m. on May 1, 2015. The final proposal documents should consist of two separate PDF files (1. proposal, 2. letters; please differentiate the two files with _proposal or _letters in the name). Successful clusters will be announced by the end of June 2015. Please note, this initiative is subject to funding.

For more information, please see the FAQ page that will be available on the Faculty Cluster Initiative webpage, linked from the Office of the Provost’s website at http://provost.ucf.edu, beginning in early January 2015.

Additional questions regarding proposals should be directed to Dr. Christopher L. Parkinson at Parkinson@ucf.edu.