UCF FACULTY CLUSTER INITIATIVE – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are clusters only for STEM-related disciplines?
As noted in the RFP, we encourage cluster proposals from ALL areas. Cluster proposals within and across any college that contribute to advancing the exploration and understanding of the human condition are encouraged. Clusters proposing innovative research intersecting areas of the arts and humanities with technology are welcome.

What is meant by “interdisciplinary and transformative” research?
Following research and policy on interdisciplinarity, the clusters should effectively integrate across disciplines and not just incorporate disciplinary contributions additively. This could include combining concepts and/or methods from multiple fields in new and innovative ways. It could include raising new fundamental questions or important new directions for research at the interface of disciplines. In all cases, clusters should require a comprehensive and integrative approach for addressing significant societal problems. Clusters are expected to be transformative in what they accomplish. This can include scholarship that leads to insights that enable new techniques or methodologies or that redefines the boundaries among disciplines.

Is the Faculty Cluster Initiative directed toward strengthening, even further, existing faculty strengths, or might one propose a cluster in a new area?
It is expected that any cluster proposal will build off of some existing capacity at UCF. At a minimum, this could be a cluster building off of faculty who have complementary areas of expertise but who have never formally collaborated. Or, this could be a cluster based upon faculty who have already demonstrated successful collaborations, but who are now seeking to take their research to new levels of excellence through additional hires. In all cases, this initiative is directed toward strengthening areas at UCF by which the hiring of faculty who cross disciplinary boundaries would facilitate conducting transformational research. A cluster proposal should be conceived of as a catalyst that creates something not achievable without the new faculty.
Is there a preference for the cluster hire proposals to be focused on “inter-college interdisciplinary” or “intra-college interdisciplinary?”

The Faculty Cluster Initiative is directed toward strengthening areas at UCF by which the hiring of faculty who cross disciplinary boundaries would facilitate conducting transformational research. A cluster proposal should be conceived of as a catalyst that creates something not achievable without the new faculty. Proposals that involve multiple colleges are suggested.

Is the statement in the RFP that the cluster should include 3-5 new hires strict? For example, can a cluster propose 10 hires or 2 hires?

The number of proposed hires in the RFP is just a guide; but the proposal must justify each hire, rank of each hire and why those hires are necessary. We expect to fund 5-7 cluster proposals across the university.

How many individuals might participate in a faculty cluster?

The initiative is directed toward strengthening areas of opportunity at UCF by which the hiring of faculty who cross-disciplinary boundaries would facilitate advancing both UCF’s scholarship and educational missions. With this in mind, the core cluster group would be the new-hires plus the UCF faculty who are working within the core mission of the proposed cluster. The “Science of Team Science” indicates that team effectiveness diminishes when team size increases and/or faculty are not co-located. There are two implications of this. First, the cluster needs a core group of committed faculty who are willing to ensure the success of the cluster. Although peripheral faculty who are associated with the cluster initiative can be mentioned as supporting a cluster, if a large number of associated faculty are described, their participation needs to be justified and their roles explained. Second, the core cluster faculty should be willing to be co-located and potentially be housed in a different location than their home department. Additionally, the core UCF cluster faculty are expected to mentor new hires within the cluster. In short, although there can be multiple faculty who will interact and collaborate with cluster faculty, these are not “core” cluster faculty.
Should the letters requested from (1) ALL the relevant chairs and/or directors, and (2) ALL the participating college deans or the Vice President for Research and Commercialization be independent or joint?

We expect one letter signed by ALL the relevant chairs and/or directors. This letter should explicitly address the department or school’s interdisciplinary collaboration readiness and additionally address plans for shared administrative support for the cluster (IT support, travel, purchasing, etc.). We expect the second letter signed jointly by ALL the relevant college deans or the Vice President for Research and Commercialization. This letter should address why they support this cluster, a financial commitment to 35 percent of the cluster start-up cost, as well as include any departmental contribution and a plan for potentially shared space.

When you ask about evidence for collaboration readiness, do you only mean prior grant funded research, or is any prior collaboration evidence?

Collaboration readiness does not have to be just grant activity. It is any kind of collaboration in which people have engaged whether funded or not. If you and colleagues from another department have successfully worked on something together, even if informally or unfunded (e.g., developing interdisciplinary courses, hosting interdisciplinary conferences or workshops), you can make a case that you have experience coordinating across programs.

Who will evaluate the cluster proposals?

The Provost will convene an initial evaluation panel comprised of 13-15 members plus the Co-Chairs (Manoj Chopra and Christopher Parkinson). The Provost has requested each Dean submit three nominees – two internal and one external to UCF – to potentially be appointed to this panel. From the Deans’ pool of nominees and from other suggested members, the Provost will select the committee. This evaluation panel will evaluate the “idea” of the proposal based on the strength of the concept. It will then provide a list of top proposals to the collaborative readiness evaluation panel. The collaborative readiness panel will evaluate the proposals from this list based on the readiness of the departments and colleges to support interdisciplinary research and the potential for success of the new hires through this initiative.
What is the role of a cluster leader or leaders (may be two individuals)?
In the near-time, the cluster leader or leaders will: (1) be the point person(s) for submitting all documents and communicate with the Faculty Cluster Initiative Co-Chairs; (2) make sure all aspects of the proposal are articulated (i.e. cluster needs: space, infrastructure, etc.); (3) help determine reporting hierarchy among participating units; and (4) ensure all required letters are written/signed and included in the application. In the long-term, this person or people will be the faculty search chair for the cluster hiring committee and will write position descriptions in consultation with participating units and the search committee. This role could change once new faculty are on board and could potentially rotate among cluster faculty. Ultimately, though, this person or people are responsible for daily “cluster management,” including the cluster’s budget. This position, however, does not replace a cluster faculty member’s home department chair.

Is there an underlying preference for the leaders of clusters to be senior faculty (full, associate professors), or can junior (non-tenured faculty) be the leaders of these clusters?
We have not limited this, and the leader may change once you start hiring into the cluster.

May emeritus faculty participate in the Faculty Cluster Initiative?
The goals of the Faculty Cluster Initiative are two-fold: 1) advance UCF’s educational and scholarship missions, and 2) build/increase our tenured/tenure-track faculty numbers. With that said, emeritus faculty are important members of the UCF community and many are very active within the universities missions. Emeritus faculty may be a cluster lead but only if there are no comparable faculty at UCF who could reasonably propose the cluster. Further, emeritus faculty can only be a short-term cluster lead playing that role in the proposal writing and the hiring process. The goal is to use the initiative to cultivate the next generation of leaders at UCF. As such, in the long-term, emeritus faculty should participate in the cluster by mentoring junior faculty and participating in the academic and research mission of the cluster. But, it is expected that cluster “leads” in the long-term will be determined by the cluster through some means they designate (e.g., rotation, elected).
As the goals of the FCI are two-fold: 1) advance UCF educational and scholarship missions and 2) build/increase our tenured/tenure track faculty numbers, can “other” types of faculty be hired utilizing FCI funds (for example, clinical faculty or research faculty).

Clinical Faculty: In general, there are two types of clinical faculty at UCF; 1) similar to tenure-track faculty, who are long term with a balanced scholarship and education assignment to the university, or 2) faculty who generate the funding to pay for their position through seeing patients. In this iteration of the Faculty Cluster Initiative, clinical faculty as described in No. 1 above may lead or participate in clusters. Also, a cluster can propose to hire these kinds of clinical faculty lines using Faculty Cluster Initiative funds. Clinical faculty as describe in No. 2 above may participate in the Faculty Cluster Initiative program but not lead a cluster. Additionally, if a cluster proposes hiring clinical faculty as described in No. 2, they must be paid for by non-FCI funds.

Research Faculty: Research faculty are those supported through a majority of C&G funding. In this iteration of the Faculty Cluster Initiative, research faculty can participate in, or co-lead, a cluster proposal. In these instances, the cluster proposal will need to clearly describe the role that these cluster members will assume, for example, mentoring the tenured/tenure-earning faculty hires associated with the cluster, teaching/mentoring students, etc. Additionally, research faculty can be proposed as part of a cluster as long as they are supported with non-Faculty Cluster Initiative funds in the short term and eventually describe how they will transition to C&G funds.

Who will be the hiring official?
The Provost will be the “hiring official,” as it is expected that there will be clusters that span multiple colleges. The search guidelines are currently being developed for cluster hires; for example, multiple hires within a cluster could be combined into a single search with the cluster lead serving as the search committee chair and current faculty within the cluster serving on the search committee. The cluster leader would coordinate the search and work together with the potential home departments in both recruitment and selection phases. There currently is a pilot cluster hire being conducted that spans four departments, and feedback from this process will help guide the new Faculty Cluster Initiative and cluster faculty search process.
What will the teaching load and/or teaching assignment be for faculty residing in an academic cluster?

We suggest that teaching loads be the same as the home unit/department/school in which the tenure of the faculty member resides. We also suggest that administrators help facilitate faculty in clusters that wish to teach a class or portion of a course, relevant to the cluster focus, in a different department or unit in which their tenure resides. Teaching across the university to advance the cluster’s educational mission will count toward that faculty member’s teaching assignment in the home department and toward tenure and promotion.

Where will the tenure reside for cluster faculty?

Faculty hired into a cluster will indicate a tenure home department during the recruiting process (could indicate more than one tenure home department during recruitment, but a single home department will be identified prior to appointment). Department chairs, in consultation with their faculty, will evaluate the candidate and confirm the department’s readiness to learn to evaluate scholarship that is interdisciplinary. That department should be integral in the recruiting of faculty and in their success as a faculty member here at UCF. In this context, faculty within the candidate’s chosen home department should demonstrate their commitment to fairly evaluating cluster relevant scholarly productivity that may be outside the home department’s traditional areas. Departments would commit to the cluster faculty assisting in the evaluation of the scholarship. Further, if a department’s T&P criteria specifically identify publication outlets for faculty, accommodations for the cluster hire would need to be explained in the proposal and articulated for the candidate.

This new initiative will require a readiness from the tenure unit to support the faculty member’s activities in the cluster, to fairly and carefully evaluate the impact of their scholarship even when different from the traditions of the unit, to be flexible on teaching assignments, and to welcome the faculty member into the life of the unit. If the faculty member is unsuccessful within the cluster or UCF due to a lack of readiness on the part of the department, the line will revert to the Faculty Cluster Initiative program for reallocation and the unit will need to demonstrate its “readiness” before receiving another line.
Is it possible for a cluster faculty member to hold joint appointments in different departments and/or colleges?
As this is an interdisciplinary initiative, we envision the possibility of numerous joint appointment requests from candidates at both the department/school/institute and/or college level. We support joint appointments and will help facilitate these requests. But it is still expected that cluster hires will have a tenure-earning home department (potentially 51% home department and 49% joint department).

How do you envision the reporting structure of cluster faculty?
Each faculty in a cluster will have a home department where their tenure resides and that determines the reporting structure. Thus, the faculty member will be reviewed annually by members of the home unit and that unit's chair or director. We suggest that the cluster leader be consulted by the chair or director as well. Members of a cluster are expected to increase the strength of their home department and participate in departmental activities to the best of their ability.

Can a faculty member participate in multiple clusters?
Yes.

If at some point a faculty member hired through the Faculty Cluster Initiative leaves UCF, what happens to that faculty line?
The faculty line will be returned to the Faculty Cluster Initiative program to be reallocated. The cluster is welcome to make its argument for reallocating the line back to the cluster. That request would be evaluated along with other cluster requests.

What happens to a faculty member if for some reason the cluster is not successful, or said faculty member stops participating in the cluster?
The purpose of the Faculty Cluster Initiative is to strengthen our long-term, research/teaching/service faculty in areas of strategic opportunity for UCF. Faculty members hired through the initiative will strengthen the units in which their tenure resides. It is possible that in the future, the current need for the cluster topic will either become institutionalized into a structure other than the cluster, will shift, or will no longer be compelling enough to keep the faculty together around the same issue. In any case, the faculty hired are expected to be ongoing, critical contributors to the life of the unit, the
college, and the university. Therefore, cluster faculty membership may shift over time. As long as the faculty member is supported and successful in the cluster and the tenure unit, the line will remain assigned to the unit.

How will space be allocated to the clusters?
As we look to UCF’s next 50 years, the goal of the clusters is to facilitate the breaking down of traditional silos and a move toward blurring the traditional discipline boundaries to form collaborative teams that will address the societal and scientific problems and issues of today and tomorrow. Evidence from the science of team science shows that the coordination of collaborative research is superior when teams are co-located which can lead to more productive research outcomes. *Clusters will be given priority in space allocation (both existing space and new buildings).* It is expected that clusters (both existing cluster faculty and new hires) advance with this co-location goal in mind – articulating an argument for not collocating is required. The cluster leader should work with the chairs/deans/directors who are associated with the proposed cluster to determine both short-term (Fall 2016) space plans for the cluster, as well as future (Fall 2018 and beyond) space plans. If renovations are required, please include in your proposal and clearly articulate the amounts that each department and college plan to dedicate to the proposed space renovations.

How is the Faculty Cluster Initiative being funded?
Funding for the new faculty hires is contingent upon the allocation of state performance funding in 2015. The Office of the Provost would provide 100 percent of the faculty line and 65 percent of the start-up costs. The colleges, departments, schools and institutes would be expected to cover the remaining 35 percent of the start-up costs for these positions.

Can the 35 percent of the startup funds package, which comes from the proposing colleges and departments, be an “in-kind” match?
In-kind match is an excellent method for illuminating partnering agencies support for a cluster area, but it may not be used as part of the 35 percent portion from the college or departments proposing the cluster.
Which administrative unit will be responsible for overseeing purchasing, office supply acquisition, IT support, travel etc. for cluster faculty?

Our current thought is that the faculty member’s home unit will be responsible for many of the items listed above. However, this could be negotiable among the participating units. For example, one unit might indicate that they would be responsible for all purchasing for the entire cluster, another unit would be responsible for IT aspects, and the third unit would be responsible for remaining infrastructure aspects.