

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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To: Campus Community

From: J. Ian Gray, Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies

Subject: Center reviews to aid efficiency and strategic use of resources

The Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies (OVPRGS), working with research associate deans and the Office of the Provost, recently developed a policy and procedures for establishing, evaluating, and terminating MSU centers, institutes, and other groups engaged in research, outreach, or service activities. With these mechanisms, MSU will be more focused and selective about initiating and supporting such entities in the future.

The new policy and procedures provide the means for limiting duplication, identifying resources for sharing, and identifying activities that best support the strategic plans of the colleges and the university. These outcomes will help MSU achieve the most efficient use of scarce resources, particularly faculty time, while maintaining a position of leadership in research and the ability to compete successfully for major grants.

The need for a structure for establishing and reviewing centers is reflected in the “Planning Initiatives” for “Shaping the Future” of MSU, the planning process President Lou Anna Simon is leading ([shapingthefuture.msu.edu](http://shapingthefuture.msu.edu)). The Committee for the Review of Institutes and Centers at Michigan State University proposed the policy and process. Provost Kim Wilcox and I have endorsed the committee’s recommendations.



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Established in December 2008, the committee presented its report in September 2009. Anthony Wojcik, consultant to the VPRGS and emeritus professor of computer science and engineering and emeritus assistant vice president for research planning, chaired the committee, which included Karen Klomparens, dean of the Graduate School, and four research associate deans:

- Douglas Buhler, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
- David DeWitt, College of Natural Science
- Leo Kempel, College of Engineering
- Pamela Whitten, now dean of the College of Communication Arts and Sciences

The group worked closely with the Council of Research Deans (CORD) to maintain communication with all the colleges. June Youatt, senior associate provost, and Linda Stanford, associate provost for academic services, provided essential help and information on the academic centers.

The result of their work is a set of recommended guidelines for establishing and reviewing various kinds of “entities,” a generic term covering centers, institutes, and similar MSU components engaged in research, outreach, or service activities. “Unit” in the recommendations refers to colleges, departments, schools, programs, offices, and the like that have responsibility for establishing, reviewing, and closing entities. In October, Provost Wilcox and I forwarded the recommendations to deans, chairs, and directors.

The report recommended seven guidelines for entities:

- An entity can be established at the university, college, or department or school level.
- An entity that spans more than one college must be established at either the college or university level.
- Each entity must submit a strategic plan when it is being considered for establishment.
- Each entity must submit an annual progress report to the appropriate administrator at the level at which the entity was established.

- All entities should be reviewed on a regular basis and all will have periodic comprehensive reviews.
- Establishment of an entity must include a sunset provision. Continuing an entity beyond five years requires a comprehensive review and an updated strategic plan.
- Entities receiving either university or non-university funds must comply with these guidelines. Exceptions are noted in the report.

The committee also spelled out recommendations for implementing the guidelines and cases where exemptions are appropriate—the Wharton Center, the National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory (NSCL), and Kellogg Biological Station (KBS), for example.

Other implementation recommendations include the following:

- Joint ventures formed as partnerships with outside units are not subject to the recommended guidelines but need to be reviewed to determine what kind of university oversight is appropriate.
- To track officially recognized entities, the OVRGS will maintain a database of information provided by administrators responsible for oversight of entities. The database, currently under construction, will contain the strategic plan, annual reports, reports of reviews conducted, and other appropriate information. The database will be searchable with appropriate controls on confidential information.
- OVRGS should oversee all university-level entities, while oversight responsibility for entities established at other levels would be identified at those levels. Information about all the entities should be available through the OVRGS Web site.

Nearly 160 centers, institutes, and other groups engaged in research, outreach, or service activities were identified as being subject to the policy. In discussions with research associate deans a number of those entities were determined to be inactive or have activities coming to an end. They will be officially removed from current records immediately. As the annual review process moves forward, additional entities may be disbanded. Outcomes of this review process include a shift in resources to ongoing entities and savings in resources, including, time, space, and funds as well as a way to identify, evaluate, and promote these programs.