

## **Guidelines for Review of Academic Centers and Institutes at Tufts University**

September 2012

Periodic external reviews and ongoing self-assessment are important for ensuring the maintenance of academic quality in Tufts' programs. The following guidelines offer instructions, advice, and suggested timetables for the conduct of external reviews of non-departmental academic units such as centers and institutes. For these guidelines, the term "center" will be used generically to stand for all such entities, even if their official name uses a different term such as "institute" or "program." The Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging will follow a separate protocol and is not subject to these guidelines.

### Definitions

A center (or institute, program, etc.) is a non-departmental academic unit that supports the research and educational activities of Tufts' schools. It may be situated entirely within one school, shared among two or more schools, or designated as a university-wide entity reporting to the provost. Ideally, a center is dedicated to research and/or teaching involving more than two principal faculty members and requiring a school or the central administration to invest in physical and/or administrative infrastructure. The presumption is that centers exist primarily to serve the mission and strategic priorities of Tufts. They will be interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary according to their foundational purpose. "Centers" that are primarily administrative in nature and not directly involved in enabling or sponsoring faculty research or other scholarly activities will, ordinarily, be exempted from this review policy.

An external review is a periodic assessment that aims to determine whether the center is fulfilling its stated objectives, maximizing its potential to enrich the academic community at Tufts, making the best use of its available resources, and maintaining a viable and sustainable set of excellent programs. An external review will be conducted by a committee of experts and peers who will be jointly selected by the center's director and the relevant deans and/or the Provost. Members of the review committee should have sufficient subject area or technical expertise to be able to contribute meaningfully to the review and any ensuing report, and be independent observers with no personal or professional interest at stake in the outcome of the review. Review committees may be constituted of appropriate experts from other academic institutions or professional organizations, and/or include Tufts faculty and academic staff.

### Assessment Criteria

All new centers will be established with the condition that they may be discontinued if certain criteria are no longer being met: for example, academic excellence, financial sustainability, critical mass of engaged participants, or compelling goals that serve the mission and strategic priorities of the university and/or host school(s). Periodic reviews will be a primary mechanism used to assess whether such conditions are being met.

Because there are many kinds of centers, the university will adjust the criteria by which each center will be reviewed to reflect its particular mission, history, and structure. The provost and/or school dean along with the center director should formulate the specific criteria by which the center will be reviewed.

Some overarching review criteria that will be broadly applicable to most centers include:

- the center's academic excellence, and, in particular, its record of having a positive impact on the research, teaching, and learning of those faculty, students, staff, and community members who are intended to benefit from its activities;

- the center’s financial health, and, in particular, its records of careful resource management and of acquisition of an appropriate level of external funds to sustain its activities;
- the center’s inclusiveness and accessibility, and, in particular, its record of optimal participation in its activities;
- the center’s academic relevance, and, in particular, its contribution to the larger priorities of the university or host school(s).

The senior supervising administrator/s (school dean and/or the Provost) should develop a set of guiding questions for the review committee that may serve as a charge to the committee and that will help shape agenda planning, inform the review committee’s interviews with stakeholders, and direct the composition of the review report.

When a new center is established, its director should begin considering, in consultation with the host dean or Provost, which benchmarks the center will use to determine whether it is making progress in its first five years towards meeting its goals. The director should also consider how the proposed center would go about measuring its performance and impact at regular intervals.

All faculty directors of new centers will have terms of appointment that may be renewable contingent upon the successful outcome of a performance review and the mutual agreement of the responsible academic sponsor (provost and/or school dean) and the director. The host dean and/or the Provost should determine the criteria by which the director’s performance should be evaluated, and give careful thought to the role and timing of the center review with respect to the evaluation of the director.

### Timing

Reviews should be undertaken at regular intervals of five years or some other suitable period that has been established by the school deans or the Provost. If special circumstances such as leadership transitions or financial exigencies require the postponement of a full external review, the center director and/or primary host school should plan for and conduct an abbreviated internal review, to be completed within two years of the time when the full review was originally expected. This interim review should seek to describe the status of the center’s operations, finances, and planning as well as to provide updates on the major findings and recommendations from the most recently available review report.

Planning for a review should commence approximately 12 to 18 months prior to the anticipated review meeting. This advance planning will allow sufficient time to budget for review costs, compose a desirable committee roster, schedule the meeting at a suitable moment in the center’s calendar, and secure the attendance of key administrators, faculty, students, and other stakeholders with whom the review committee will meet. The host school or the Office of the Provost can provide a suggested planning timeline to facilitate the preparations for the review.

Agendas and background materials provided to the review committee in advance should be finalized approximately one month prior to the meeting date.

### Review Committee Membership

The dean(s) of the host school and/or the Provost will work with the center director to come up with a roster of possible committee members with significant professional standing in their respective disciplines or practice domains. The senior administrator sponsoring the review (dean or provost) must approve the roster prior to any invitations being extended. When applicable, the center director should take responsibility for assembling short c.v.’s or profiles of proposed reviewers and describing the special contribution that these individuals would make to the review process.

On a selective basis, especially suitable Tufts faculty members or academic staff may serve on external reviews of Tufts centers provided that:

- they are not directly involved in the governance of the center as a present member of an executive council, steering committee, or other group responsible for the center's management;
- they have the necessary background to evaluate the center's performance;
- they have no conflict of interest in carrying out this service.

Participating Tufts faculty members, staff, or trustees may not receive honoraria for their service on review committees for Tufts centers.

### Agenda and Materials

Background materials, committee rosters, agendas, self-studies, center annual reports, and other documents pertaining to reviews should be kept on file at the center and the appropriate offices of the host school. Relevant items from previous reviews should be made available to subsequent review committees to ensure continuity of purpose and accountability to the review process.

Host schools are encouraged to develop a set of templates to be used for invitation letters, thank you letters, agendas, guiding questions, dashboard metrics, and other routine business documents that are part of the review process for all their centers. These templates will ensure quality control and consistent messaging about the university's expectations regarding the review process, and they will relieve individual center directors from having to compose new routine documents that may be uninformed by established procedures, best practices, and preferred stylistic conventions.

Agendas must be developed in consultation with the school dean, the Office of the Provost, and the review committee chair, as applicable. Customary agenda items include:

- overview presentation by the center director;
- detailed presentations on priority initiatives and research projects;
- interviews with primary stakeholders, including senior administrators, the center steering committee, participating faculty, visiting scholars or post-doctoral fellows sponsored by the center, and graduate student and undergraduate researchers;
- a working lunch and/or executive sessions for the review committee to discuss the progress of the review.

All meeting agendas should have a concluding executive debrief session with the Provost, school dean(s), and/or center director as applicable.

At the request of the Provost and/or school dean, a representative of the university administration may be asked to serve as a confidential liaison to the review committee and to attend the review meeting in its entirety. This university representative can provide broader contextual information and impartial high-level administrative support to the committee during the course of the review.

### Logistics

Responsibility for meeting room reservations, committee member accommodations, the scheduling of stakeholder interviews, and other routine logistical matters will fall to the center's staff, or in the absence of such staff, the staff assigned by the host school(s).

The costs of external reviews will be borne by the primary host school or the Office of the Provost as appropriate, including honoraria, reimbursable expenses for the review committee members, catering, and related expenditures for rooms, staffing and note-taking, and supplies. Therefore, schools and the Provost need to budget or set aside sufficient funds for the review in advance.

If honoraria are offered to external reviewers, the amounts should be sufficient to incentivize participation and acknowledge the commitment made to the University, but need not be excessive. Participating Tufts faculty members or trustees may not receive honoraria for their service on reviews of Tufts centers.

### Review Reports and Follow-Up

When applicable, written reports generated out of a center review should be completed and submitted to the relevant university leaders within two months of the review meeting. The review report should address the charge and the guiding questions given to the committee in advance, the findings and recommendations that it formulated during the review meeting, and progress on pertinent recommendations made in a previous review report.

**A special note about review recommendations.** The primary role of the review committee is assessment, and therefore its members should be appropriately circumspect in their advocacy on behalf of the reviewed center. The university administration and the center director understand in advance that, ordinarily, more resources (funding, staffing, space, etc.) would likely enhance the center's activities. Therefore, unduly ambitious recommendations for more resources are less helpful to the university in responding to the review report. If the review committee finds that the center's activities are negatively impacted by a resource deficiency that may jeopardize its continuation, it should engage the university administration during the review as to what realistic options are available for addressing this situation. Suggestions from the review committee for how the center might go about acquiring additional external resources are welcome. Recommendations for radical changes in the organizational alignment or structure of the reviewed center should also be made with an awareness of the administrative framework in which the center was created.

**Confidentiality.** The reports that come out of reviews of centers will be considered confidential internal documents and will not be published or distributed without the prior approval of the provost or relevant school dean. Internally, review reports may be selectively shared with key faculty or administrators who have a business purpose in knowing about the reports' contents. To ensure that stakeholders can feel confident in offering candid remarks during their interactions with the review committee, the reports should refrain from quoting individuals by name.