



February 1, 2008

DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES  
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MEMORANDUM

TO: All Faculty

FROM: Rathindra N. Bose  
Vice President for Research  
and Dean of the Graduate School

RE: Request for Proposals - Multidisciplinary Research Clusters

You are aware, I am sure, that the NIU strategic planning process has identified *developing a strategy for investing in multidisciplinary scholarship and artistic clusters* as one of its four major strategic imperatives. In order to implement this initiative, I am soliciting proposals from the university community for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research clusters. Details on how to develop a proposal are provided in the attached guidelines of the Request for Proposals (RFP).

Please note that no funds have been designated for this project yet. However, we anticipate investing some seed funds in those projects that not only meet the criteria outlined in the RFP, but also lay out sound plans for self-sustainability beyond the initial investment period.

Proposals will initially be evaluated by an adhoc committee, members of which will be nominated by the Graduate Council in consultation with the College Deans, and approved by the Provost. Further evaluations of the recommended proposals by the College Deans may be necessary to ensure the consistency with the colleges' priorities, to congrue with future hiring plans of the colleges for sustained efforts, to effectively manage and allocate human/capital resources necessary for the project, and finally to remove any redundancy. In consultation with President Peters, Provost Alden and I will make the final decision, hopefully by the end of the Spring 2008 semester.

Please forward your proposals directly to me by April 4, 2008.

cc: Vice Presidents  
College Deans  
Department Chairs and Directors

## **Multidisciplinary Research Clusters Request for Proposals**

The purpose of this RPF is to create interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary research clusters. Definitions of Interdisciplinary<sup>1</sup> and multidisciplinary<sup>1</sup> research, adopted from a report from National Academy of Sciences, are given below. The university seeks to create clusters with the necessary critical mass of faculty/staff to advance or create knowledge beyond the disciplinary boundaries in emerging frontiers; to offer educational and research experience to students that are not traditionally possible within the existing academic structures; to foster collaborations across the campus; to enhance economic development for societal benefits; and to advance the reputation of Northern Illinois University as an engaged institution.

To secure university recognition and support, a proposed cluster must:

1. Raise the visibility of the university and strengthen our national standing as an institution of research and artistry;
2. Foster long term collaboration involving participants from more than one academic unit;
3. Have a clearly defined focus involving investigation of problems or questions (or the production of artistic outcomes) that, by their nature, can be best investigated (produced) by joining the methods and conceptual (artistic) resources of the disciplines involved in the cluster;
4. Provide unique educational opportunities to students, through either multi-disciplinary programs, courses, or research (artistic) apprenticeships, which are unavailable apart from the cluster.

### **Proposal Format**

Research cluster proposals should adhere to the following format, and should be no more than 15 pages in length (single spaced; no less than 11 font; and one-inch margin on each of the four dimensions, left, right, top, and bottom).

#### **I. Definition of Proposed Cluster**

Elaborate the nature of your cluster by addressing the following points:

- A. Name and mission of the proposed cluster
- B. Goals and objectives of the proposed cluster

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<sup>1</sup> The following were taken from *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research*, 2004, National Academies Press online: "Interdisciplinary research (IDR) is a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice. Multidisciplinary research is taken to mean research that involves more than a single discipline in which each discipline makes a separate contribution. Investigators may share facilities and research approaches while working separately on distinct aspects of a problem. For example, an archaeological program might require the participation of a geologist in a role that is primarily supportive. Multidisciplinary research often refers to efforts that are additive but not necessarily integrative."

- C. How the proposed cluster would serve the academic mission of the university (potential and actual benefits to students, NIU, and society at large, as appropriate)
- D. Uniqueness of the cluster, i.e., why the goals & objectives stated under I.B can not pursued under current disciplinary structures
- E. New curriculum development and/or degree creation through the cluster and their impact on students in both qualitative & quantitative fashion
- F. Composition of the team, and team members' identity. If outside members are involved, in what capacity they would serve.
- G. Critical mass to accomplish the goals & objectives. Do you need new faculty to fill in missing component or complement the existing strength? If so, identify the number of faculty needed and their academic homes.
- H. Projected accomplishments in five years that can be assessed/measured as outcomes
- I. Examples of the existing clusters, if any, in the country/world and their impact in the academy (if known)

## II. Required Resources & Estimated Cost of the Cluster

Specify resources needed (in \$/year) and the source of funding for those resources in following categories:

- A. Faculty released time for collaborative research activities, proposal writing, graduate/undergraduate student advising etc. This released time is to support activities above and beyond your disciplinary research and other current activities.
- B. Graduate /undergraduate students fellowships (GA, RA, Summer support, etc.)
- C. Tenured/tenure track faculty, research faculty, postdoctoral support, research associate/assistant, start-up cost for faculty
- D. Travel support for meetings/conferences, research trips
- E. Administrative support (secretary, student assistant, telephone, internet, office equipment)
- F. Equipment support (new procurement, maintenance, etc.)
- G. Organized seminars (invited speakers)
- H. Student recruitment & publicity

Total operational resources (from categories III A-H) needed for each year: \$

Total institutional support/commitment: \$

Total anticipated support from extramural funding: \$

## III. Qualifications of the team

- A. Briefly describe the expertise of the team members in relationship to the proposed activity
- B. Describe the scholarly productivity of individual members of the team in terms of (i) scholarly activities (publications in peer reviewed journals,

books & book chapter, monographs, invited plenary/symposium speakers, editors/editorial board members, and other acceptable forms of scholarship in your disciplines) (ii) extramural funding, (iii) successful advising of doctoral dissertation as advisors or co-advisors, and masters' thesis, and undergraduate thesis. Supply vitae of key personnel as appendices to the proposal. In preparing your vitae please follow the NSF format.

- C. List the competitive extramural research grant proposals submitted, and amounts requested, by the members during the past five years. Indicate which were funded, and for what amounts.
- D. Describe other accomplishments of the members that are relevant to the proposal.
- E. Describe the existing collaborations among the members.

*(Note that a succinct summary of section III should be included in the body of the proposal. However, vitae of key personnel should be attached as appendices in the NSF format as stated above.)*

#### IV. Structure & Sustainability of the Cluster

- A. How would the activities be sustained, either with or without NIU funds?
- B. Describe the operational details, administrative & academic, of the proposed cluster.

#### V. Evaluation Plan

Describe the evaluation plan that will be used to determine if the research cluster is achieving its stated goals. The evaluation plan should include (but is not limited to):

- A. Quantifiable **performance indicators** (numerical quantities that can be compared across time, across units or across institutions).
- B. **Milestones** (key steps in the process of implementation whose completion can track progress towards achieving the goal).
- C. A **summary process** that integrates quantitative and qualitative indicators of success to give a nuanced understanding of the outcomes produced in relation to the outcomes originally sought.

#### Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by the following criteria:

- A. Relevance of cluster to the academic mission of the university, and to the call for interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary activity
- B. Impact on undergraduate and graduate education
- C. Impact on scholarly activity
- D. Qualifications of the team
- E. Potential for distinction as an interdisciplinary cluster
- F. Potential for enhancing extramural funding
- G. Self sustainability
- H. Cost/benefit factors