

Executive Summary

The University of Iowa (UI) has a long and rich tradition of research and creative excellence spanning diverse areas of scholarship. This reputation is national, and in many instances international, and a reflection of the creativity and effort of the faculty, staff, and students at UI.

The Task Force on Research and Creative Excellence was convened by the Provost in May 2009 to: “Articulate priorities for enhancing areas of excellence in research, scholarship, and creative activities at The University of Iowa, and to make recommendations on the broad interdisciplinary themes that will provide distinction to the University in the years ahead.” Inter-, multi-, trans-disciplinary collaboration (referred to collectively as IDR) has become an essential aspect of contemporary research because many of the problems facing society are complex and require involvement from multiple disciplines and units that cross traditional boundaries. In fact, many of the ‘grand challenges’ facing the world that have been identified by a variety of distinguished organizations, (e.g. the National Academy of Engineering, the National Endowment of the Humanities, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Gates Foundation) all require IDR for viable solutions. In addition to the potential research and creative synergies possible through IDR (as noted above), our task force has considered the current fiscal milieu and the importance of extramural support in formulating our recommendations.

Our Task Force focused on five specific charges:

- 1) What is the existing and future infrastructure needed to support research, scholarship, and creative activity? In what ways can the re-conceptualization and rebuilding of the arts campus support research, scholarship, and creative activities?
- 2) What are the barriers to IDR collaborations and how can they be lowered or removed? What factors have been identified as beneficial to successful, high quality interdisciplinary collaborations that already exist on campus?
- 3) How can the University better incentivize the faculty to seek increased extramural support for their research, scholarship, and creative activity?
- 4) How can the University encourage and support research, scholarship, and creative activity that benefit the State of Iowa and its citizens through economic development and community engagement?
- 5) Given current resources and realistic enhancements, what are the 5 to 10 areas of research, scholarship, and creative activity that will provide the University international eminence and distinction in the next five years and into the future?

Recommendations

With respect to these charges, we make the following recommendations:

- 1) Infrastructure:
 - Provide adequate skilled Information Technology (IT) support staff, additional equipment, and expanded central IT facilities.
 - Build and/or purchase physical infrastructure and equipment essential to create vibrant environments for research and creative endeavors.
 - Increase administrative support for pre and post-award administration.
- 2) Interdisciplinary Collaboration:
 - Implement the recommendations of two prior task forces (Apicella and Grassian reports) that have examined IDR.
 - Form an advisory committee that addresses promotion and tenure matters specific to inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary activities.
 - Establish an advisory committee to evaluate collaborative centers, proposals, and to provide seed money.

- Establish a facility on the east side of campus (similar to IIBD on the west side of campus) that would facilitate IDR and creative excellence.
- 3) Incentives:
- Develop a university-level policy by July 1, 2010 that articulates formal faculty research incentive plans for each College.
 - Create faculty incentive plans adequately flexible to address differences in culture across academic units.
 - Ensure that faculty incentive plans will incorporate a threshold salary offset model that allows salary offset to be used for program development or direct remuneration.
 - Ensure that faculty incentive plans will be supported by a reallocation mechanism to return a meaningful percentage of the indirect costs to the unit (typically the College) above a base level of faculty and administrative (F&A) support.
- 4) Community and Stakeholders:
- Ensure that engagement and outreach activities are rewarded in review and promotion processes.
 - Produce and maintain a website listing all University of Iowa outreach activities.
 - Include representation of University researchers and scholars on relevant steering and planning committees related to outreach.
 - Develop enhanced educational materials that clarify the role of economic development and technology transfer in the outreach and engagement missions of UI.
 - Establish a panel of experts in community-based participatory research (CBPR) who will guide, educate and support investigators in CBPR.
 - Develop educational programs incorporating community engagement in research and scholarship.
 - Encourage talented faculty and staff to pursue publicly engaged projects, including a program for “public scholars.”
 - Consider civic engagement and public outreach as important evaluative criteria on proposals for new faculty hires.
- 5) Strategic Areas of Emphasis: While the Task Force identified 8 areas of possible research focus (see **Appendix C**), we believe our most important contribution to this charge was the articulation of the principles to guide the selection of areas of focused excellence. These principles could guide the evaluation and prioritized funding of future initiatives. These include:
- A current reputation for or an emerging profile of excellence, including (inter)national recognition and the promise of influence within and beyond academia locally, nationally and globally.
 - Placement at the juncture of two (or more) disciplines; inter (not just multi)-disciplinary, recognizing that the whole should be greater than the sum of the parts.
 - A viable form of sustainable, fiscal support (whether grants, tuition, philanthropy, or something else).
 - An ability successfully to recruit faculty, staff, and strong trainees into the 'area' at UI.
 - A well-timed opportunity, focusing on circumstances unique to UI's environment within the next 5 years.
 - A response to one of the grand challenges of the current historical moment in world history.
 - A new direction in the creation and preservation of new knowledge and/or in the manner of inquiry.
 - Recognition of the importance of globalization/internationalization.

It is our sincere hope that this report will help to guide faculty, administrators, staff, and students at the University of Iowa during the next 5 years as we seek even greater achievements in research and creative excellence.