This Operating Instruction specifies policies and procedures for establishment and review of centers within the Graduate School of Engineering and Management (EN). This instruction does not address additional requirements for formal establishment of a Center on AFIT’s Unit Manning Document, which will not normally occur.

1. References.

   Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, as amended
   ENOI 36-109
   ENOI 36-118

2. Policy. The Graduate School of Engineering and Management’s vision is to become the top-ranked graduate school of choice in engineering and applied science for defense-focused research-based education. Consistent with this vision, Centers will be established within the Graduate School to facilitate research and interdisciplinary programs at levels not readily achievable in the existing departmental structure. Centers must have a vision statement, a plan forward to enhance AFIT’s ability to accomplish its mission, shall be endorsed by one or more academic departments and the Dean for Research, and must be approved by the Dean. The School and departments will encourage faculty and student participation in the high priority research activities of the centers as appropriate. Established Centers will be regularly reviewed, typically at three year intervals, for continuance, closure, or increased investment.

3. General expectations. Center designation is a mechanism to communicate AFIT’s strengths, provide greater visibility for associated faculty, and lend additional credibility to the Center
Director when engaging with potential sponsors. In keeping with this intent, only a limited number of Centers will be authorized in EN. Centers are expected to enhance AFIT’s reputation in relevant academic and military communities via publication of significant research results in appropriate venues, support of graduate students, postdoctoral research associates, and junior faculty; and participation in collaborative ventures and outreach. Centers should be financially self-sustaining with external resources, although departments should ensure that resource requirements of Center-affiliated full-time faculty and AFRB-quota students continue to be internally supported at or above the level of non-center-affiliated faculty and students. Center activities will be predominantly interdisciplinary, involve faculty from multiple departments, and must address a research thrust critical to AFIT’s strategic interests. Centers will have a distinguished review board with prominent external members to provide advice, facilitate new research connections, and enable technology transfer.

4. Definitions. The following definitions for Centers within the Graduate School of Engineering and Management are provided as a framework for designating categories of centers. This terminology need not be duplicated in the formal title of the Center, but should be used consistently in briefing charts and promotional materials as needed.

4.1. Center of Excellence: Centers designated by an external agency, as the result of a national review process or formal center proposal competition.

4.2. Center for Specialized Research: Center designated by the Dean to acknowledge an internal research strength of strategic interest to the Graduate School.

4.3. Collaborative Center: Center established as a joint operation with another organization under a formal agreement approved by the Dean.

5. Procedure for establishing a Center.

5.1. Preliminary interest. Faculty interested in establishing a new Center should engage in preliminary, informal discussions with other faculty, relevant department heads, and the Dean for Research to evaluate the level of interest in the new concept. If substantial potential is identified, a formal proposal may be pursued.

5.2. Formal proposal. A formal proposal is required to establish each category of Center, and must address the areas identified below. For Centers of Excellence, the Dean for Research may accept the proposal requirements of the external agency as sufficient, or may request supplementary documentation addressing remaining areas as needed.

5.3. Vision and Mission statements. The Center’s vision and mission statements should clearly indicate the intended focus of the activities, with sufficient breadth to encourage appropriate growth. Include long term goals and near term objectives designed to accomplish the mission and approach the vision.

5.4. Expected benefits. Discuss the expected benefits that the Center will bring to the Graduate School, the DOD, and the nation. Are the vision and mission statements aligned with the EN Strategic Plan or higher level planning documents? How will the academic
environment be enhanced (e.g. from seminars, workshops, student participation in research group meetings, interdisciplinary activities)? Will the Center facilitate the mentorship of junior faculty, recruitment of research personnel, and financial support for students? What is the potential for intellectual property development and technology transfer? Will the Center engage with peer institutions or other Centers nationally and internationally?

5.5. Current status. Document funded or unfunded research projects for the past three years related to the proposed Center (including faculty and student participation levels), available space and equipment, proposals pending, and refereed journal publications. Describe the current funding environment in the focus area, and any expected expansion or contraction in future years. Attach curriculum vitae of key personnel. This information should establish the existing strengths in the research focus area, as well as the potential for expansion and growth.

5.6. Business plan and support requirements. Describe the planned business operations of the Center for the first three years, clearly identifying support requested from the department(s), school, and external sponsors. Center director salary, staff support, space requirements, equipment, supplies, and maintenance costs should be addressed, as well as the known or anticipated sources of each. Which faculty have committed to participate, and at what level? How many students, from which programs, are likely to participate? Based on these projections, what is the Center’s request for supply and travel support?

5.7. Organizational structure. Identify the recommended “home department” for the Center, including a brief rationale. The Center director will report to the department head of the home department. (Additional details of center director appointments are described in ENOI 36-118, Faculty Pay Plan Appointments.)

5.8. Distinguished review board. Preliminary recommendations for distinguished review board membership may be included with the formal Center establishment proposal. No invitations to potential board members should be extended without the prior approval of the Dean. (Note: Board members must be federal employees, unless the approval processes required by the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, as amended, are followed.)

5.9. Proposed review criteria and timeframe. Provide recommended metrics for future reviews of the Center activity and requested timeframe for first Center review, typically three years after establishment.

6.0. Approval process. Using a staff summary sheet, the formal proposal for Center establishment will be routed to the Dean via the home department, other participating departments and the Dean for Research. The Dean may request a briefing, or act upon the proposal as provided. Required changes to the Center title, vision and mission statements, metrics, school support, and timeframe for Center review may be identified prior to final approval.
6. Distinguished review board meetings. Distinguished review boards meet as needed (typically at six month to two year intervals) to provide advice to the Center Director regarding national research priorities, potential funding sources, and other matters relevant to the operation of the center. Such advice is not to be considered directive, and should be documented in meeting minutes maintained by the Center. The Department Head, Dean for Research, and Dean will normally be consulted prior to scheduling distinguished review board meetings or finalizing agendas; and will be provided copies of the meeting minutes. New board members may be invited by the Dean to serve, typically upon the recommendation of the Center Director, Department Head, and Dean for Research. The Center Director will notify the Dean for Research if it is anticipated that the interval between distinguished review board meetings will exceed two years.

7. Center reviews.

7.1. Centers will be regularly reviewed by the Graduate School using the criteria identified in 7.3, although alternative or additional criteria may be identified during the center establishment process or subsequent reviews. Reviews will typically occur on a three year cycle, unless the Dean elects to establish a four or five year cycle due to exceptional performance with high expectations for stability. Earlier review may be initiated by the Dean, Dean for Research, or Department Head upon the change of Center director, significant indications of Center non-performance or deviation from agreed upon goals, or in the event of serious institutional resource constraints.

7.2. The Dean for Research will initiate the Center review process by requesting a self-study from the Center Director addressing the review criteria in 7.3, with a due date four months later. The self-study will be transmitted to the Dean for Research with a recommendation for action by the cognizant Department Head. The Dean for Research will review the self-study with the Dean.

7.3. Review criteria.

7.3.1. Alignment with School priorities, as identified in the EN Strategic Plan or higher level planning documents.

7.3.2. Publication productivity of faculty and students, with consideration of quality metrics relevant to the discipline.

7.3.3. Self-sufficiency as evidenced by appropriate external funding.

7.3.4. Interdisciplinary strength as evidenced by the involvement of faculty and students from multiple programs.

7.3.5. Effective use of allocated space, including support to other faculty research efforts.
7.3.6. Effective outreach efforts, as evidenced by engagement with external partners, high visibility workshop or conference sponsorship, etc.

7.3.7. Fostering internal “research group” environment – strong faculty, student, and research associate involvement.

7.4. Review outcomes. Following review of the Center’s Self Study, the Dean may elect to approve/disapprove center continuance, request additional information, appoint a review committee to obtain a written recommendation from other experts, and/or implement a corrective course of action. Disapproval of center continuance may occur when external funding is insufficient to sustain the activity, productivity goals are not being achieved, the focus area is no longer consistent with AFIT priorities, or for other substantive reasons.

8. Resources.

8.1. Centers will normally be operated within academic departments. Therefore, the Department Head is responsible for facilitating the appropriate resourcing of the Center in consultation with the Center Director. The Dean and department heads will collaboratively identify appropriate resources for Center activities benefiting multiple departments.

8.2. Department heads should delegate control of appropriate space and equipment resources to the center director as needed for him/her to effectively facilitate the Center’s success.

8.3. All central funding to the Graduate School from Air University is provided to meet the Air Force’s advanced academic degree requirements. However, to the extent that the Center is supporting required graduate student research activities and faculty development objectives, the Department Head may designate a portion of the department’s budget to the Center for supplies, travel, and other requirements.

8.4. Salary support for Center Directors may be provided in accordance with the provisions of ENOI 36-118, Faculty Pay Plan Appointments.

8.5. Sponsor funding associated with Centers will be recorded with a Center affiliation and a department affiliation, as identified on the internal proposal approval form (see ENOI 36-109, Funded Research Projects.)

8.6. Military graduate students may be preferentially assigned by departments to participate in Center research projects as part of their thesis and dissertation efforts, consistent with the intent to involve students in high priority research efforts of benefit to the Air Force and Department of Defense.

9. Center relationship to academic departments.
9.1. Academic departments will retain responsibility for the Graduate School’s educational mission, including responsibility for all courses offered, whether for credit, by distance learning, or non-credit.

9.2. The Center Director and the Department Head(s) have a shared responsibility for the research mission. The Department Head(s) may delegate oversight of research facilities, assignment of equipment usage, and other matters to the Center Director as desired to facilitate the success of the Center and efficient operations.

9.3. All faculty appointments, including Center Directors as appropriate, will reside in a primary academic department.

10. Responsibilities of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

10.1. Maintain list of approved Centers, including implementation date and review dates.

10.2. Initiate reviews in accordance with schedule.

10.3. Maintain project records and annual research report substantiating Center activities.

ADEDEJI B. BADIRU, Ph.D., PE
Dean
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Attachment:
Appendix A
Appendix A

Sample center review self-study content

Center name:
Date established:
Director:
Responsible department:

Vision statement:

Mission statement:

1) Center Plan Forward: Alignment with school priorities
   - address connections to EN, department Strategic Plan, or higher level planning documents
   - summarize the Center’s research agenda, including major current projects and plans
   - identify current and potential sponsors
   - identify benchmark organizations and major competitors

2) Center productivity indicators (list for each of the past 3 fiscal years)
   - faculty participants (estimate % time related to center activities)
   - citations of refereed journal publications
   - funded projects (title, PI, sponsor, funding level, period of performance)
   - student theses/dissertations completed or underway
   - research associates and civilian students supported
   - seminars/workshops sponsored
   - articles published in appropriate newspapers or magazines highlighting center accomplishments

3) Estimate of school and department resource allocation to Center, including
   - current FY school-funded salary/benefits for Center Director and assigned support staff; travel support (including distinguished review board), school-funded contract support, etc
   - approximate total value of assigned equipment, with list of school-funded 3080 equipment acquired during the past five years or anticipated during the next two years
   - location and approximate square footage of assigned laboratory and office space

4) List of current Distinguished Review Board members (if applicable), and copies of last two DRB reports

5) Identify additional school resources required to achieve “plan forward,” if applicable

6) Letters from relevant department heads, addressing perceived benefits of the Center (e.g. support to the academic mission, increased prestige, benefits in recruiting faculty and students, etc.) and making recommendations with respect to center continuance, next planned review date, or other appropriate matters. Letters from external partners are also encouraged.