

Faculty Senate Review of the Gund Institute for Environment.

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In this review, we used the Gund Institute Year Five Report for 2017-2022, the University of Vermont Gund Institute for Environment External Review Report dated December 19, 2022, and the criteria in the Draft Research Center Review Self Study Guidelines (v4 11-30-21pp).

The external review report is glowing and very thorough. We are in general agreement with its assessment and recommendations, and feel no need to duplicate their work.

Standard I: The Center or Institute has a clear and publicly stated purpose that contributes to the mission of the University.

The Center/Institute ***contributes to the mission*** of the University by:

- a) Having an active strategic plan that is aligned with the vision, mission, and strategic priorities of the University.
- b) Promoting a global perspective and appreciation of cultural and intellectual diversity.
- c) Contributing to university-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts
- d) Fostering the qualities of respect, integrity, innovation, openness, justice, and responsibility as expressed in *Our Common Ground*.

Assessment:

Clearly, the Gund is highly aligned with UVM's mission. Its five themes align closely with UVM's emphasis on healthy environment and healthy communities. As a research institute, it contributes to UVM's RI status aspiration.

Standard II: The Center/Institute Fulfills its Mission

The Center/Institute *fulfills its mission* by:

- a) Supporting research and creative activities that generate new knowledge and enrich the intellectual environment for students, staff, and faculty
- b) Engaging faculty, post-doctoral fellows and other affiliates with scholarship relevant to the mission, providing a summary of research publications, grant proposal submissions and awards, mentorship of students, applied work, and outreach/benefit to the broader community/state/region/nation.
- c) Providing adequate leadership, faculty, support staff, financial resources, library resources, equipment, and facilities to accomplish its purpose.
- d) Attracting extramural funding, both external grant funding and donor commitments that contributes to long-term stability.
- e) Contributing to university-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts

Assessment:

The Gund Year Five Report provides ample evidence of a high level of funded research activity in each of the five theme areas. This activity has been productive in terms of peer-reviewed publications, global profile, and real-world applications. We note with approval that the Gund has broadened its portfolio of faculty fellows and research grants to include faculty across the schools and colleges of the University.

Gund leadership has actively and successfully secured both donor commitments and external grant funding. Their donor and foundation funding has been diversified well beyond the Gund Family gift, for a total of \$18 m in new commitments (through 2027). Based on three years of project reporting, the seed grant program has generated \$16 m in external grants, out of \$80 m in submitted proposals. It would be good for future Institute reports to provide information on where research grants are submitted, and how diverse the research funding sources are.

The Gund has been actively engaged in the diversity, equity, and inclusion work of the University. They launched an Equity and Justice research theme and intentionally crafted programs and policies to diversity their teams. Their efforts have paid off, particularly in terms of the proportion of PhD fellowship recipients and post-docs who are persons of color, international, and/or women.

Standard III: The Center or Institute Contributes to Society and has a positive impact on Vermont

The Center/Institute *contributes to society* by:

- a) Engaging in relevant application of new knowledge to contemporary problems through teaching, scholarship, creative activities, service and outreach, depending on the specific focus of the center or institute.
- b) Providing specific evidence that the work of the center/institute contributes to society
- c) Demonstrating that the work of the center/institute has a positive impact on the state.

Assessment:

Again, the Gund Institute clearly meets this standard. Virtually every project of the Gund benefits society generally, and many of them benefit Vermont in particular. Just one of many examples is the Vermont Climate Assessment, which is led by Gund Fellows from three colleges and is attracting private gifts and, hopefully, a federal appropriation.

Standard IV: Evaluation of Efficacy

- a) Evidence of an assessment of center/institute operations and efforts at quality improvement
- b) Evidence of an evaluation of the center/institute's efficacy in fulfilling its mission (e.g., has established metrics or benchmarks and assesses achievement of those benchmarks on an annual basis)

Assessment:

The Institute meets this criterion. Appendix I of the Year Five Report reports on outcomes on 23 performance metrics organized by four categories (Catalyze transdisciplinary research, Connect UVM with state, national, and global communities, Governance and operations, and Solve critical environmental problems). As part of this review, new proposed metrics for broader social impact are being finalized.

Standard V: Financial Support/Budget

- a) Evidence of a clear strategic budget plan to maintain the financial viability of the center/institute
- b) Current level of self-support and description of what is needed to create greater self-sufficiency (including both revenue generation efforts and cost saving measures).

Assessment:

We lacked the information to fully comment on this criterion; the Year Five Report provides Gund Institute operating expenses for FY18 through FY22 (Appendix 3), but no information about sources of operating income, or about a “strategic budget plan.” The external review states that the Gund Institute needs “stable base funding to allow for long-term planning and recruiting and retaining high quality staff.” As the Gund has grown the number of grants, partnerships, Fellows, graduate students, and post-docs, its academic administrative and staffing needs to support this activity have also grown.

We don’t know how much base funding the Gund currently receives. Certainly, the Gund understands the need to diversify its operating budget sources and to be as self-sufficient as possible. In our view, the Gund has a justifiable claim to some level of stable base funding, and will be unable to develop a strategic budget plan without knowing what level base funding it can expect to receive from the University in upcoming years.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

The Gund Institute is a high-performing research institute evaluated against all of the criteria we were able to evaluate based on the information we had. We commend and thank them for their work.

We have a few recommendations to offer, in no particular order.

1. Continue working to develop relationships with COM and CNHS to develop funded research in the environment and health space, which presents an abundance of topics with equity implications.
2. Engage in leadership transition planning. There is no urgent need to identify the next leader, but it is good to have a plan. An associate director position would be useful for this purpose (and others). We agree with the external reviewers that it is wise to build redundancy in leadership.
3. We strongly agree with the external reviewers’ recommendation, and the Institute leadership’s plan, to periodically refresh the research themes.
4. In the diversity and inclusion area, we recommend the strategy of “flipping” post-docs to faculty positions, where there is good fit. We resonated with the external reviewers’ fifth “opportunity and challenge” about providing better support for diverse and international students. We were concerned to learn about affiliated faculty having difficulty in funding the last year of PhD students connected to the Institute, particularly as this might specifically impact BIPOC and international students. A commitment of bridging funds by the colleges and schools, including the Graduate College, seems appropriate given the impact of the Institute on program growth.