University of Iowa Cluster Hire Initiative
White Paper Assessment
November 2012

Background

In 2009, the University of Iowa (UI) embarked on an ambitious "cluster hire" initiative with the goal of bringing 100 new faculty to campus to collaborate with existing faculty in multidisciplinary areas focused on "Grand Challenges" of the 21st century. To date, five clusters have been approved: water sustainability, digital public humanities, the aging mind and brain, genetics, and obesity.

In the spring of 2012 the Office of the Provost and the collegiate deans requested that Associate Provost for Faculty Tom Rice produce a brief white paper on the state of the clusters, in order to recommend improvements to the cluster hire guidelines and suggest best practices to help ensure the success of the clusters. ACE Fellow Phyllis Baker assisted Associate Provost Rice in conducting the review.

This white paper is based primarily on interviews with cluster leaders, cluster steering committee members, faculty members hired into the clusters, and the DEOs of cluster hire faculty. The cluster five-year plans were also consulted.

State of the Clusters

The clear and predominant message from the constituency groups interviewed is that the cluster initiative is off to a very successful start.

- DEOs, cluster leaders, and steering committee members often stated that the presence of the clusters facilitated recruiting top-notch faculty members.
- The new cluster faculty members are very pleased to be part of their clusters.
  - The cluster faculty members are developing an esprit de corps.
  - The cluster faculty members generally understand what is expected of them in the cluster and in their home departments, and they are comfortable with those expectations.
- Cluster faculty members, steering committee members, and DEOs report that cluster leaders are doing an excellent job.
  - The leaders are generally working well with DEOs during the hiring process and in the annual review process for cluster faculty.
  - The leaders are facilitating a sense of community among cluster faculty.
  - The leaders are attentive to the development of their new faculty.
  - The leaders are focused on securing grants for cluster research and cluster administrative support.

- o The leaders have developed, along with their cluster faculty members and steering committees, long-range plans for their clusters.
        - o The leaders are effective advocates for their clusters to departments, colleges, and other campus constituencies.
    - All of the constituencies interviewed report that the collegiate deans and their associate deans have been very supportive of the clusters.

Opportunities

In addition to the many positive comments about the operation of the clusters, the constituency groups did identify areas of untapped opportunity. These fit into four categories: communication, support, instruction, and leadership.

<u>Communication</u>

The success of a cluster depends in large part on open lines of communication among three key actors: the new cluster faculty members, the cluster leader(s), and the DEO(s) of the cluster faculty members. Figure 1 below illustrates this triad.

FIGURE 1. CORE CLUSTER COMMUNICATION PATHS
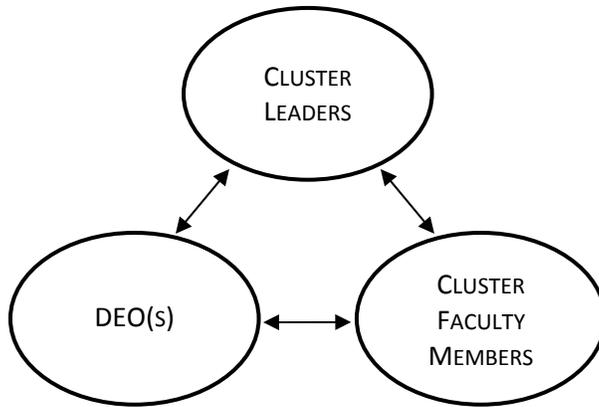
The lines of communication are strong between the cluster faculty members and their DEOs, and between the faculty members and the cluster leader(s). In most instances, there is also significant communication between the DEOs and the cluster leaders. It is critical, however, that communication along this path be regular and productive. This is the key path to making sure that DEOs understand the clusters and the role that their new faculty members are performing in the cluster. Similarly, communication along this path is how cluster leaders will learn about what their cluster faculty members are doing in their home departments and what the departments think about their new faculty.

Recommendation #1: Require one meeting per semester between cluster leaders and the DEOs of the faculty members in their cluster. The meeting will be to review the progress of the faculty member in the department and cluster, and to agree on expectations for the faculty member from both points of view.

Two additional communication needs are for meetings between: 1) the cluster faculty members' department(s) and the cluster leader(s); and 2) the cluster steering committee members and the DEOs of cluster faculty. These communication paths have been added to figure 2 as dotted lines.

FIGURE 2. RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL CLUSTER COMMUNICATION PATHS
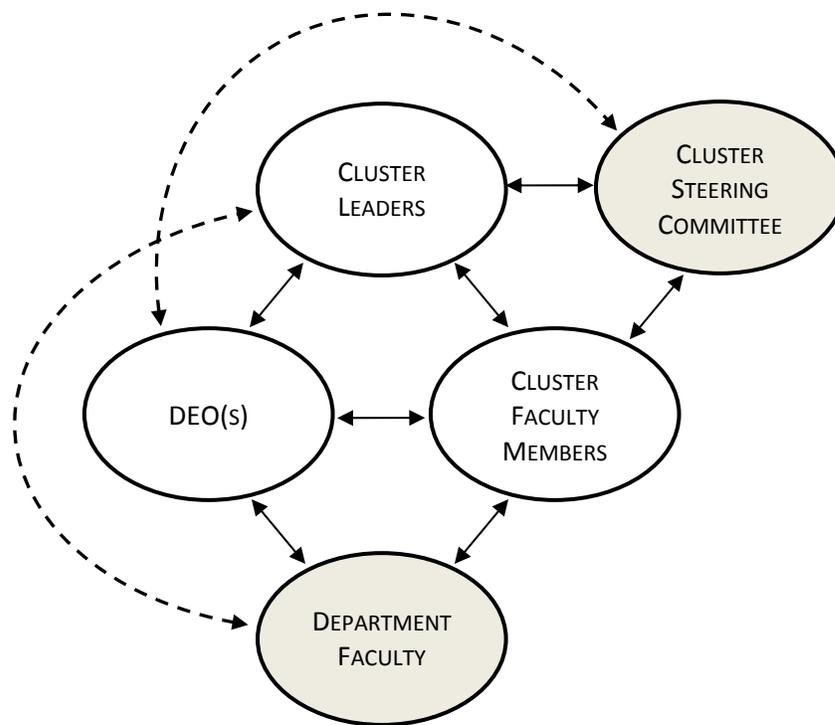
Cluster hire faculty members will be more likely to succeed in their home departments if the department faculty clearly understand the cluster's goals and how their faculty member is contributing to those goals cluster. The DEO can convey this information to the department second-hand, but there are significant benefits to learning this information directly from the cluster leader(s).

Recommendation #2: Require one meeting per academic year between the faculty in each cluster faculty member's department and the cluster leader(s) for the purpose of educating the department about the cluster and the role the cluster faculty member plays in it.

The success of cluster hire faculty will also be improved if DEOs fully understand the work of the cluster. Cluster leaders can convey this to DEOs, but it would be valuable for DEOs to meet once every academic year with the full steering committees of the clusters so that they can learn first-hand about the cluster's interdisciplinary breadth.

> *Recommendation #3: Require one meeting per academic year between the DEOs of the cluster faculty members and the cluster steering committees for the purpose of educating DEOs about the interdisciplinary work of the cluster and the role their faculty members play in this work.*

Support

The long term success of the clusters depends on securing grants to fund research and offset administrative needs. Given that almost all of the cluster faculty members are junior in rank, it will take time for them to develop grant programs. It makes sense to continue to provide the clusters with modest administrative budgets for several more years.

> *Recommendation #4: Provide the clusters with modest administrative budgets for at least six years.*

Cluster leaders and cluster faculty members mentioned a need for small pilot grants for new cluster faculty.

> *Recommendation #5: Clusters should consider using some of their administrative funds for seed grants.*

The clusters have very different space needs. Some clusters can operate successfully without dedicated space, while others might benefit significantly from having space for faculty offices, labs, and other purposes. Space is, of course, at a premium on campus, and space decisions necessarily involve several parties.

> *Recommendation #6: Going forward, new cluster proposals should include space needs. For existing clusters, space needs should be submitted annually to the deans, the Office of the Provost, and the Office for the Vice President for Research for consideration.*

Cluster leaders are eager to work with the UI Foundation to solicit private funds for their clusters. The University is entering a comprehensive campaign and the clusters, as a centerpiece of the UI strategic plan, are a natural focus for private fund raising. Indeed, the UI Foundation is featuring the clusters in many of their appeals and Foundation staff members have met with some of the cluster leaders.

Recommendation #7: Convene a meeting of all of the cluster leaders with UI Foundation professionals to learn about the extent to which the clusters will be featured in the Comprehensive Campaign and the extent to which cluster leaders can be involved in the campaign.

Instruction

Contributing to the UI's instructional mission is one of the core responsibilities of the clusters. Progress in this area should accelerate as new entry-level cluster faculty members achieve tenure and are able to dedicate more time to instructional development. Several instructional opportunities seem especially suited for the clusters. Indeed, some clusters have already started work in one or more of these areas.

Recommendation #8: Clusters should consider developing instructional content in the following diverse ways:

a. *offering first year seminars;*
b. *assuming academic responsibility for a living-learning center;*
c. *developing large-lecture introductory undergraduate courses in their areas, possibly for general education credit; and*
d. *developing certificate programs.*

Instructional development is an excellent opportunity for senior faculty members who are interested in the clusters to step in and have an immediate impact on the success of the clusters.

Leadership

Good leadership is important for any initiative to do well. This is especially true for the clusters because of their interdisciplinary composition and because almost all of the cluster faculty members are early in their careers. The current clusters leaders have provided excellent leadership. There is a need, however, for additional leadership from among existing senior UI faculty. These leaders could come from the cluster steering committees and from other faculty on campus. What is critical is that these senior faculty members have a research commitment to the cluster subject and that they are open to mentoring and collaborating with new cluster members.

Recommendation #9: New cluster proposals should require significant documentation that current senior UI faculty will play an active role in the development of the cluster, including mentoring and working with junior faculty. Existing clusters should strive to build active involvement among current faculty.

Another way to infuse the clusters with senior leadership is to hire senior scholars (associate and full professors) into some of the cluster positions. Hiring senior scholars would also instantly raise the stature of the clusters outside the University.

>*Recommendation #10: Make funds available to hire at least a few senior scholars into each new cluster. Consider converting some unfilled lines in existing clusters to senior lines. Also consider adding opportunity hires to existing clusters for prominent senior scholars.*

The Office of the Provost and the deans have developed strong guidelines for selecting clusters, recruiting cluster members, and evaluating cluster members during the pre-tenure process. What is less clear is what the Office of the Provost, the deans, and the Office of the Vice President for Research see as the long-term place of the clusters at the University. Are they expected to achieve "center" status? What would this mean? Are they expected to achieve self-financing in the long-term, or will administrative support from the University continue? Will they continue to report annually on their progress to the Office of the Provost, the deans, and the Office of the Vice President for Research, even if there is no annual financial support from those offices and even after the hiring is complete?

>*Recommendation #11: The Office of the Provost, the deans, and the Vice President for Research, in consultation with the cluster directors, should develop a long-term vision for the clusters.*