Question: What is the purpose of the Achieving Distinction Program?

Answer:
For the University to develop—aligned with the objectives of Vision 2020—relevant, connected and productive research capacity in tandem with meaningful and long-term relationships with strategic partners including but not limited to regional health systems, businesses, industry, governments, and not-for-profit organizations, which increases the likelihood that partner funding may be leveraged to greater investment to achieve student, University, and regional success.

Question: To whom, in what format, and by what date should a Proposal be submitted?

Answer:
To be considered, the Proposal must be emailed as a Word document to Patti Huth at phuth@uakron.edu by May 18, 2012.

Question: Will Proposals be accepted and evaluated for areas beyond Regional Solutions, Human Condition, Innovative Technologies, and Health Care and Medicine?

Answer:
No. Only proposals which focus on these 4 areas will receive consideration for funding. Keep in mind, urban issues and education, community health/accountable care, clinical research/simulation, societal issues, arts and culture, advance materials, devices or energy are topics within these areas the focus of the program.

Question: Will a Proposal which includes only a single discipline be evaluated?

Answer:
No. Only proposals which convey a strong interdisciplinary approach with faculty from multiple colleges will receive consideration for funding.

Question: Is a Proposal limited by length?

Answer:
Yes. The Proposal is limited to 10-pages in length. Please consult the Provost’s website for the specified components of the Proposal.
Question: What is the annual funding for the Achieving Distinction Program?

Answer:
The funding is expected to be $2 million per year which, compounded over time, may result in a $140 million investment over 10 years.

Question: Is the Program’s funding limited to just personnel costs?

Answer:
No. Personnel costs are expected to account for the largest investment, but equipment and other startup costs are acceptable as well, consistent with the principles of the Program.

Question: Are there any responsibilities attached to awarded dollars?

Answer:
Yes. Awardees will be expected to file an annual report.

Proposals that include committed external and local resources will likely rate higher than proposals without such commitments.

Question: Will funds be awarded in one-year increments only?

Answer:
Funding follows two streams: continuing funding for personnel positions and cash funding for start-up, seed money, etc. Funded proposals should anticipate continued funding for the personnel strategically hired directly through the RFP award process. In addition, future personnel positions for that research initiative may be funded on a continuing basis per the 10-year strategy. Cash funding should not be anticipated for more than one year, unless the small seed funds are explicitly awarded for several years due to the nature of the proposal that is funded. Some multi-year commitments may be considered/awarded as deemed appropriate, but annual reports will still be required.

Question: How will the $2 million in cash, that is non-continuing funds, be used to support the approved faculty hires and the selected RFP research emphasis?

Answer:
Each year, the budgeted funds to support hiring additional faculty will accumulate while the approved searches are conducted. The accumulated unspent funds during that year will total $2 million. We will devote that $2 million to the start-up funds necessary to support the researchers; we anticipate spending that money on laboratories, equipment and resources necessary to enable the researchers to conduct their proposed research.
**Question:** $2 million sufficient to provide start-up funding for more than 4 laboratory-based researchers? If not, how will we build sufficient laboratory-intensive research capacity in the achieving distinction areas to accomplish the goals of the program and the selected RFPs?

The Achieving Distinction program changes the way we think about supporting our researchers. If we repurpose underutilized laboratories, we may reduce the cost of start-up funding below $500,000 for each new hire. Thus, we can support hiring more new researchers each year.

**Question:** Can additional start-up funds for laboratory researchers be obtained?

**Answer:**
Departments and colleges can collaborate in devoting additional funds for start-up as a strategic investment in the new faculty. Strong RFPs and research plans aligned with key partners, especially in industry, could provide sources for start-up funding from those partners. Hiring leading researchers who will bring their own grant funding can also provide additional sources for start-up and other research funding support. Strategic and collaborative research agendas should generate external future support to grow the funded research cluster.

**Question:** How can new or current faculty members share equipment and laboratory space as part of a team and still prove themselves on their own research agendas and productivity requirements?

**Answer:**
The purpose of the Achieving Distinction program is to build research capacity around addressing and resolving a complex interdisciplinary problem whose solutions will have a major impact on the well-being of people regionally and globally. Each funded RFP will propose and adopt a strong research theme.

Building research capacity around that theme centers upon equipment needs for addressing the necessary research agendas. Collaborative and intersecting research agendas should produce shared equipment needs among researchers with the capacity to use that equipment to conduct the research that fulfills the purpose of the selected RFP.

We anticipate that strategic hires will fill gaps in expertise and have intersecting research agendas with other faculty in the cluster. The community of researchers thus formed will collaborate in thematic research, may need common equipment to meet multiple researchers’ needs, and will mutually plan to purchase equipment capable of meeting those multiple needs. Faculty will share responsibility for identifying the equipment appropriate for their shared and individual needs.
Question: Is there available money for an RFP to seek to support programming rather than faculty compensation or research start-up funding?

Answer:
A funded RFP may qualify for up to $150,000 cash for up to three years to support programming. The clusters are expected to become self-sustaining; program funding would ideally come from grants awarded, partnership alliances and other external sources.

Question: Can the RFP seek additional support for a currently ongoing research project or program?

Answer:
The Achieving Distinction program envisions 1) new collaborations across multiple disciplines and colleges that engage external partners or 2) accelerated current multidisciplinary plus partner research collaborations around a theme of pressing importance.

To the extent that a current research program seeks to expand its impact with additional researchers in cognate areas, it would be appropriate for the RFP. Similarly, to the extent that current faculty working across disciplines seek to work collaboratively to enhance their collective ability to conduct research, and to add others with expertise that will grow and accelerate the research agendas on that theme, it would be appropriate for the RFP.

Question: We have several critical gaps in expertise in our department/college that we want to fill through hiring pursuant to the Achieving Distinction strategy; if we add an interdisciplinary component to our search requirements and obtain another department or college’s expression of interest in interdisciplinary courses taught by that proposed faculty member, will that meet the purposes of the RFP?

Answer:
Gaps in expertise within a discipline or college are capacity needs. Filling those gaps is not a function of the Achieving Distinction strategic hiring. Isolated interdisciplinary collaborations in hiring a faculty member do not meet the vision of Achieving Distinction, no matter how outstanding the individual faculty hire. These requests should be pursued through positions approved to address capacity needs in programs qualifying for maintenance or investment.

For the Achieving Distinction faculty positions, current faculty from across campus must jointly identify a significant contemporary problem that cannot be solved without the combined efforts of people from many perspectives and disciplines working together with partners who confront those problems pragmatically in the regional or global community. Those faculty should then propose working together and identify other researchers whose expertise would be necessary or beneficial to collaboratively addressing the theme and producing solutions. The strategic hiring funds will be used to hire the faculty who will contribute to the collaborative through their research and participation.
FAQs Added April 18, 2012:

Question: Can the RFP include an appendix? Will the appendix count toward the 10-page limit? What are some of the elements (e.g., commitments from external and internal partners, letters of support, resumes of potential strategic hires, and budget) appropriate for an appendix?

Answer:
Yes, the RFP contemplates the ability to include appendices. Each RFP should have an appendix with faculty biographical sketches (NSF-like), signature pages (department and college signature pages can include statements of support, including resources, each is willing to pledge) and external partner statements of interest, collaboration and support. If desired, the resumes of potential strategic hires may be in an appendix, but the RFP narrative must refer to the expertise needs in the section on proposed hiring strategy. The budget should be in the narrative as the proposed use for funds.

Question: The RFP it talks about partnership support. Does support encompass more than monetary support? What kind of evidence (e.g., letters from the partners) is required to represent partners’ support?

Answer:
Yes, the RFP contemplates support that is both monetary and non-monetary. Resource support is especially sought as a mechanism for leveraging the faculty expertise and investment and achieving efficiencies that will benefit all partners. But support of other kinds is also important and encouraged. Participation in helping to focus or define the research agendas and willingness to provide the opportunities to conduct the research and apply research findings into practice are critical measures of success. Letters of interest and commitment to work with the research group, of dedication of resources, or of support for the need to conduct the research, and any other indicia of participation and support, would all be appropriate means of indicating a partner will support the research group. Short of a letter, proposers may include statements in the RFP of having held discussions with a specified partner and representative that has expressed openness to further exploration (and the type of exploration).

FAQs added April 25, 2012

Question: Many of the FAQs seem directed toward scientific and empirical research-oriented collaborations. Does Achieving Distinction recognize that fine and liberal arts-oriented proposals will have different emphases?

Answer:
Yes. Many early questions were generated by faculty who are organizing around scientific and empirical problem-based collaborations. Achieving Distinction is broader than those focus areas. Thus, it is likely that proposals for the clusters in Human Condition (e.g., Arts and
Culture) and Regional Solutions (e.g., Urban Issues) may be focused around a theme rather than be problem-based, and will involve creative work as well as discovery research.

Question: The RFP notes that the Provost and the VP for Research will make the funding decisions in conjunction with suggestions made by an advisory group.

(1) Who will comprise the members of this advisory group?
(2) How will any conflicts of interest be avoided in this process?

Answer:
The advisory group will be individuals who can offer perspectives about the alignment of proposals with Vision 2020. Advisors with actual or perceived conflicts of interest will not be used.