Supporting Collaborative Knowledge Creation at Ball State University

Initiated fall 2008
A. Preamble
The purpose of this document is to support collaborative Knowledge Creation across disciplinary boundaries. The term “knowledge creation” is intended to be inclusive of all creative, design, research, scholarly, and other forms of disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary work.

The document outlines policies, procedures and guidelines for the establishment, operation and (as appropriate) sun-setting of administrative platforms for disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary collaborative Knowledge creation; these administrative platforms are referred in this document as a Knowledge Group (KG) or a Knowledge Unit (KU) because of the wide range of names they may adopt such as centers, clinics, consortia, institutes, labs, studios, etc.

Establishing such platforms enables a clear administration of the many knowledge creation collaborations that involve faculty members, researchers, graduate assistants and visiting fellows within or among the many university disciplines and/or with outside participants.

As disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary collaboration happens within the research, education, and service context of the university, a certain amount of overlap with administrative and service units as well as academic departments on campus can be expected. The transparency of practices called for in this document should obviate complications from that potential.

Individual faculty members of course will continue to carry out individual disciplinary research and scholarly activities or informal collaborations outside of a knowledge creation organization framework; this document simply complements that tradition by offering a meaningful supplementary structure and resources for formal collaboration in the pursuit of external funding.

from Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Our Panarchic Future*

“Healthy forests all have an adaptive cycle of growth, collapse, regeneration, and again growth. During the early part of the cycle’s growth phase, the number of species and of individual plants and animals quickly increases, as organisms arrive to exploit all available ecological niches. The total biomass of these plants and animals grows, as does their accumulated residue of decay—for instance, the forest’s trees get bigger, and as these trees and other plants and animals die, they rot to form an ever-thickening layer of humus in the soil. Also, the flows of energy, materials, and genetic information between the forest’s organisms become steadily more numerous and complex. If we think of the ecosystem as a network, both the number of nodes in the network and the density of links between the nodes rise.

During this early phase of growth, the forest ecosystem is steadily accumulating capital. As its total mass grows, so does its quantity of nutrients, along with the amount of information in the genes of its increasingly varied plants and animals. Its organisms are also accumulating mutations in their genes that could be beneficial at some point in the future. And all these changes represent what Holling calls greater "potential" for novel and unexpected developments in the forest's future.”
B. Description of Knowledge Creation Organizations

Establishment of a knowledge creation organization is an important activity that represents a strategic commitment with a long term vision. The approval or recognition of a proposed knowledge creation organization is made by the Provost on recommendation from the Associate Vice President for Research. Homer-Dixon’s description of a forest ecosystem is a good analogy for how we envision knowledge creation environment at BSU. At BSU it is possible to establish formal knowledge creation organizations of different categories of activity that spur, encourage, and nourish disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge creation:

1. Knowledge Groups (KG)

2. Knowledge Units (KU)

1. Knowledge Groups (KG): KGs are the simplest collaborative knowledge creation organizations that can be formally recognized at BSU and listed along with other knowledge creation organizations. Knowledge Groups allow for small groups of individuals to come together around a specific topic or funding for a relatively short period of time with minimal bureaucratic process. Each KG will typically be named after a specific topic area, such as Radon Working Group, Geochemistry Working Group, Interactive Buildings Working Group. Interdisciplinary groups are highly encouraged.

Some KGs will be created by or sponsored by KUs or academic departments. The administrative support from the sponsoring KU or academic department can be in the form of staff time, use of facilities, and other in-kind resources or monies. KGs identify specific start and end dates to carry out exploration of topics with clearly defined objectives, outcomes, and time line.

However, KGs may request an extended period of time beyond the target duration in order to meet the group’s objectives. The formation of a KG should be communicated by the group leader to the chair(s) of participants’ department(s), dean(s) of the college(s), director(s) of the sponsoring KU(s), and the Associate Vice President for Research using the KG Establishment Form: https://goo.gl/QvVE8y

There are many advantages to forming Knowledge Groups.

a. It is easy to form and declare Knowledge Groups and gain immediate access to the university's knowledge creation resources. It is also easy to dissolve/sun-set Knowledge Groups.

b. KGs are not subject to the establishment, approval, reporting, and assessment processes of KUs. KGs just need to be “declared” with Sponsored Projects Administration. Sponsoring KUs establish any reporting requirements for KGs, which will be ultimately reported to the AVPR.

c. Some Knowledge Groups may be incubators for potential knowledge units by allowing for groups to test the waters. The incubation time would allow the group to succeed by gaining immediate access to established administrative support, vet the group’s processes, and allow the freedom to take risks, which are essential to nurture an entrepreneurial spirit of knowledge creation.

d. KGs are not a part of the KU Forum described in Section E. However, KGs are identified in the online collaborative network for knowledge creators at BSU.
2. **Knowledge Units (KU):** KUs are flagship organizations at BSU that advance the strategic mission of collaborative knowledge creation over long periods of time, in alignment with the strategic plan of the university. KUs represent significant commitment of resources by the multiple individuals, external funding agencies, and BSU over at least a three-year time frame.

KUs are formed around strategic themes and topics with prospects to attract multiple projects and resources, and house knowledge creation fellows from within and/or from outside the university. In distinction to KGs, KUs are formed within a larger frame work of a long term mission, resource commitment, operation, accountability, and reporting. KUs are also vital components of support for post graduate and doctoral education at BSU. Thus, KUs play a key role in helping academic departments and other organizations on campus deliver on the educational and service mission and integrate knowledge creation with teaching and service. KUs are typically named as centers or institutes or studios or labs or consortia (of industry or other external organizations).

**C. Procedure to Establish New Knowledge Groups and Units**

1. Registering a **Knowledge Group:**
   
   a. **Obtain sponsorship** from an academic department(s) or an existing Knowledge Unit.

   b. Contact the Director of Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) to submit the Knowledge Group Declaration that contains the following information:

      A. **A description** (up to two-pages) of the group, including any current or anticipated project start and end dates.

      B. **Names** of the participating individuals.

2. **Establishing Knowledge Units**

   A Knowledge Unit Proposal should include the following information in addition to completing a Knowledge Unit (KU) Establishment Form: [https://goo.gl/MQFPtY](https://goo.gl/MQFPtY)

   Strategic Project Plan (SPP) for the KU over at least a three-year period should be arranged as follows:

   a. **Executive Summary:** A one-page outline of the proposal.

   b. **Purpose and need for the unit:** Outline the need for a number of faculty members to pursue research together in a single administrative structure, and the relevance of the unit to the University's strategic plan. Demonstrating specific connections to BSU’s strategic objectives are encouraged.

   c. **Proposed administrative structure,** including reporting lines (chair, deans, etc) and the formation and organization of an advisory board.

   d. **Membership:** Provide a frame work that defines what constitutes a formal membership and affiliation as well as duration and basis of the membership.
e. **Funding Plan**: A detailed plan for the funding, sustenance, growth, and evolution of the KU.

f. **Resources needed**: Identify all the resources needed to start and operate the KU. The resources could include but are not limited to funds, release time, space and equipment, in-kind donations, and personnel.

g. **Educational mission**: The role, if applicable, of the proposed KU in supporting academic or non-academic certificates and/or degree programs to integrate knowledge creation with teaching.

h. **Additional Success Metrics**: Define and detail additional measures and timeline for success if they differ from the metrics established by the university.

i. **Sustainability Strategies**: Identify the plan for making the unit sustainable (largely self-supporting) and describe the key indicators of progress towards sustainability. Identify the intellectual property likely to be produced and strategies to commercialize IP as appropriate.

j. **Naming**: If the proposed KU’s name is to contain the name of an individual or a private organization, please refer to BSU’s rules and regulations concerning naming rights: [https://ballstate.box.com/v/BSUNaming](https://ballstate.box.com/v/BSUNaming).

k. **Appendices**: Include any necessary data or supporting documents relevant to the other sections of the proposal.

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**D. Funding**

Knowledge Units are expected to be funded mainly through external sources such as donations, grants, endowments, intellectual property-based revenues, and revenues from educational and service activities. Given the large variance in the resource needs for different KUs, each proposal will be individually evaluated by the office of the Associate Vice President for Research and matched with available internal or external funding opportunities. Internal funding requests may include course releases, temporary staff, graduate assistantships, and operating expenses. Cost sharing from departments and colleges is expected.

Knowledge Groups are structured around externally or internally funded or potentially fundable projects. Staff, facilities, and other university resources become part of the sponsorship framework for KGs. Cost sharing from sponsoring units is expected.

**E. Accountability**

Knowledge Groups simply provide a two-page update about the ongoing activity on an annual basis to Sponsored Projects Administration, in addition to any other reporting mechanisms established by their sponsoring organizations.
All Knowledge Units are reviewed by the office of the Associate Vice President for Research annually based on the procedure outlined below. The AVPR will appoint a Knowledge Unit Review Committee to evaluate the annual reports. The review committee will recommend to the AVPR the continuation or termination of a KU. Completion of the annual review is an essential condition for continued support from the university including facilities, maintenance, and other resources. Annual Report by existing Knowledge Units is expected to be submitted to the AVPR’s office by the due date established for each reporting unit. The reporting deadlines are spaced and distributed throughout the year.

1. Executive Summary
2. History of the unit
3. Current Administrative Structure
4. Strategic Plan that includes goals and objectives of the unit
5. Progress along the success metrics
6. Unit’s contributions to knowledge creation and dissemination since the last annual report
7. Involvement of students in the unit’s projects and activities
8. Financial summary
9. Future plans and rationale for continuation of the unit

**F. Termination (Sun-setting) of Knowledge Groups and Knowledge Units**
Knowledge Groups have in-built sun-setting provisions unless extended.

Knowledge Units that are recommended for termination by the review committee will be put on a two-year probation track with a set of targets. If by end of the probationary period the performance of the unit still lags the targets established by the AVPR, then, in collaboration with all reporting lines, the unit will be terminated and the resources of the unit will be reallocated.

**G. The Knowledge Network**
All KUs automatically become members of the *Knowledge Network*. The network is chaired by the Associate Vice President for Research. The Net will meet regularly to share experiences, foster inter-unit communication, and establish best practices. An online collaborative network for the KU community is available to easily search and strengthen the interconnections between the various KGs, KUs, departments, and individuals.