AGENDA ITEM V A

PROPOSED NEW ACADEMIC/RESEARCH UNITS

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE

INSTITUTE FOR COASTAL ECOLOGY AND ENGINEERING

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Board of Regents Guidelines: Proposed Centers, Institutes, and Other Similar Academic/ Research Units provide two different procedures for reviewing new academic/research units based on their projected sources of funding. For proposed units to be funded through non-state funds, the Board of Regents shall consider a period of approval for one year while external funding is established. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) requests such approval for the Institute for Coastal Ecology and Engineering (ICEE).

STAFF ANALYSIS

1. Description

Several organizational units and faculty at ULL are currently engaged in research that is critical to the protection and maintenance of Louisiana's valuable coastal ecosystem. The proposal states:

> *As with most large research organizations, these highly-productive entities/personnel working in the area of coastal ecology and engineering have generally worked independently of each other due to the lack of a programmatic "binding" within the UL Lafayette research program structuring. Albeit, highly focused relatively single disciplinary research groups do provide significant benefit to the basic science behind technological issues, they unfortunately tend not to holistically address broad-sweeping problems because of the lack of disciplinary depth and, hence, research vision. To address highly complex issues, such as problems facing Louisiana's coastal environment, the organization of an integrated research group that is ... multi-disciplinary encourages ... interactive program development and facilitates increased technical communication* [that is] *is needed to provide an effective mechanism for optimizing university research activities.*
>
> *The Institute for Coastal Ecology and Engineering (ICEE) is proposed as a means for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to provide such a framework for organizing its existing university centers and researchers into the research team envisioned above. To accomplish this goal, the university will primarily rely on current centers/institutes and faculty to provide the bulk of the relevant expertise and focus. However, a few strategic faculty hires will be performed to finalize the design of a nationally competitive team*

capable of extending the boundaries of knowledge and provide valuable insights into efforts needed to protect and restore the coastal environment of Louisiana.

The following goals are given for ICEE:

- Advancing the impact of scientific knowledge and technology upon public policy and programs dealing with the restoration of Louisiana's coastline and associated inland marshes
- Developing the potential of this essential area as an improved habitat for both Louisiana's citizens and wildlife
- Fostering scientific and educational programs that assist in both restoration and protection of Louisiana's coast, its people, and economy
- Developing an eco-tourism industry within the culturally rich area of south Louisiana

ULL proposes the coalition of several existing centers and selected individuals into an institute that will serve as the institution's primary focal point for issues dealing with protecting and enhancing coastal ecosystems. Each member center will be allowed to remain in tact because the missions of these member entities are actually broader than just coastal science and engineering. In fact, these university centers and institutes have proven to be quite effective within their research arenas. However, if integrated appropriately, these centers and relevant researchers should coalesce into a nationally competitive team in the area of coastal engineering and ecology.

2. Need

From the proposal:

The lack of a truly integrated engineering and ecology approach to addressing issues facing coastal systems was pointed out at the recent Board of Regents Hurricane Conference in New Orleans (2006) as a key need for truly advancing in-state scientific capability into an effective team capable of holistically addressing critical knowledge gaps and the development of reasonable solutions.

3. Faculty

ICEE will be jointly directed by faculty representing engineering and ecology interests. Expertise of faculty proposed as affiliates for ICEE include:

Biology
Civil Engineering
Chemical Engineering
Electrical and Computer Engineering
Computer Science
Marketing
History & Geography
Business & Information Technology

Education

Estimates of faculty time for selected key faculty were provided. The proposal suggests that additional faculty and staff at ULL are likely to participate in ICEE activities as competitive proposals are submitted and funded.

> *Because of currently existing expertise on its campus, UL Lafayette is already making significant contributions to better understanding and responding to various coastal restoration and protection challenges. This expertise will be much more effectively applied when it is coalesced and marketed as a comprehensive R&D group, thus better positioning UL Lafayette to participate in analyzing, planning, and designing vital restoration and protection projects. The university administration at UL Lafayette is fully dedicated to augmenting this expertise in a few key areas and creating the framework and support to focus on critical state and national coastal restoration and protection issues.*

4. Facilities & Equipment

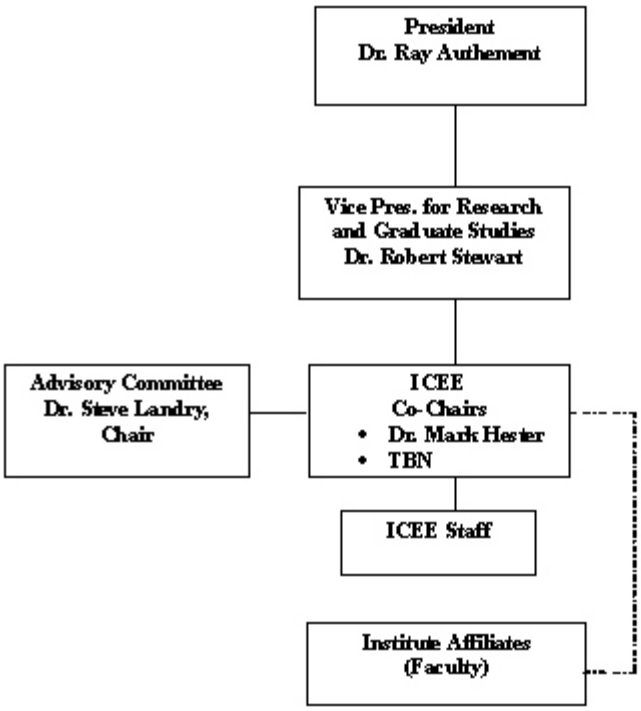
Physical resources presently available to researchers at ULL were listed by categories; no major equipment purchases or additional facilities should be necessary for ICEE activities.

5. Administration

Two co-directors representing engineering and ecology will guide ICEE activities. One of these co-directors will to serve as a chief operating officer who handles the business aspects of ICEE. Institute leadership will report directly to the Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies at ULL.

The Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies will appoint an executive oversight board to provide institutional governance from key stakeholder groups on campus, including the Director of Sponsored Research and the Deans of Sciences and Engineering. An external technical advisory committee (ETAC) will provide guidance and to facilitate the exchange of information. The ETAC will be comprised of three government representatives, two academic representatives, a high school teacher and three representatives from industry, as specified below:

Government:	one from state one from US Army Corps of Engineers one from US Fish & Wildlife Services
Academia:	two from out-of-state universities to facilitate interactions with other states
Industry:	two from consultant firms one from an industrial group



This administrative approach is not expected to significantly impact the current administrative structure of the campus.

6. Budget

ULL has committed a total of $300,000 for the first year of the Institute's existence, with anticipation of external grant monies comprising a substantial component of ICEE funding for subsequent years. A breakdown of anticipated expenses for year one are indicated below.

$ 75,000	Engineering Co-Director (@ 75%)
100,000	Ecology Co-Director (@ 75%)
95,000	General Operating Funds
30,000	Administrative Support
$ 300,000	

In AY 206-07, ULL was awarded $ 1,037,614 in federal and State monies for research that could be coalesced into ICEE. The institution has indicated its commitment to assuming some of the costs of administrative salaries and other operating expenses anticipated for ICEE activities in the future. Conservative projections for grants/contracts suggest that within a few years, the Institute will generate revenue.

STAFF SUMMARY

The University is to be commended for focusing its existing research units on the recovery, protection and maintenance of Louisiana's wetlands and coasts. Recent events have highlighted the necessity for coastal restoration and prevention of additional land loss if wildlife and resources are to survive. The need for such an institute is immediate; related funding opportunities are likely to be available.

When the institution requests full approval, it will have to justify the time period for approval by demonstrating that funding is likely for those years.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant conditional approval for the Institute for Coastal Ecology and Engineering at the University of Louisiana -Lafayette for a period of one year. If a proposal for full approval for the Institute is not received by the Commissioner of Higher Education by February 1, 2008, the Board of Regents shall reexamine ongoing need for the Institute.