IUCRC Evaluator Protocol: Recommendations for Improving the IUCRC Evaluation Effort
Overview

- Background
- Key Questions
- Revision Principles and Strategy
- Proposed Changes
- Conclusions
- Questions/Discussion/Next Steps
Background

• Past discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of our evaluation effort
  – Response rate
  – Role of Advisor
  – Etc.

• Had preliminary discussion at 2006 meeting
  – Evaluation grant was under review for renewal:
    » Discussed a general strategy

• Agreed to form a committee to make recommendations about possible changes
  – Denis Gray (chair)
  – David Meyer
  – Gary Phye
  – Craig Scott
  – Eric Sundstrom
Background

• Process
  – Established some goals/questions
  – Held three conference calls
  – “Homework” assignments between calls
  – Developed a set of recommendations
Defining Questions

• Defining Questions
  – What is working and not working well in our current approach?
  – How can we enhance the value we provide NSF, the directors and other IUCRC stakeholders via our evaluation activities?

• Approach
  – Deal with highest priority issues
  – Not a complete an exhaustive review
Working and Not working

Working

- Utilization-focused evaluation emphasis (provide actionable information to key stakeholders)
  - Open-ended comments and suggestions
  - Benchmarking and longitudinal comparisons
    » Survey feedback can produce some surprises
- LIFE Form data is valuable for project decision making
- Evaluator’s report is useful, manageable and fulfills an important accountability function
- Producing good high quality studies that contribute to the literature and understanding of I/U cooperation
Not working

- Response rate on surveys is suffering and with it the value of the feedback
  - Faculty feedback seems particular problem
  - Value of faculty feedback may decay over time
- Perceive a “questionnaire burden” among participants
- Timeliness of our feedback sometimes suffers and with it the value of the feedback
- Unclear about the follow through on and the value of the exit interview
Working and Not working

• General Observations:
  – Although the goal(s) of our evaluation activities are implied in various documents, we do not currently have an explicit goal statement to guide our efforts
  – Current evaluation protocol is a combination of a survey feedback, applied and fundamental evaluation efforts
    » While all have value, it is not clear if we need to address all of them as part of the core evaluation effort
Enhancing the value

Revision Principles

• Emphasize providing feedback that is timely and actionable

• Where possible and valuable maintain continuity of database for historical and longitudinal analysis purposes

• Be sensitive to data gathering burden placed on respondents without sacrificing value of information

• Changes should be work neutral for evaluators
  – If we drop significant activities, should try to add other value adding activities
Enhancing the value

Revision Strategy

• Develop an explicit overall goal statement(s) for the evaluation effort

• Attempt to shorten and focus currently used P/O questionnaires for annual data collection

• Continue to solicit targeted studies (student theses, evaluator initiated) to supplement and amplify core evaluation effort

• Solicit feedback from other stakeholders (evaluators, NSF and directors) about the merit of proposed changes

• Attempt to complete changes in time for fall 2007 data collection activities
Proposed Changes
IUCRC Evaluation Goals

Primary

• To help document IUCRC outcomes and accomplishments at both the center and program-level
• To promote continuous improvement at both the center and program level by providing timely and actionable data-based feedback, analysis & advice (e.g., ombudsperson)
• To identify and communicate center and program-wide best practices

Secondary

• To help promote a better understanding of industry/university research cooperation
Process/Outcome Questionnaires

Industry Questionnaire

• Create a shortened “short” form of the P/O questionnaire by
  – Dropping questions that do not seem to provide value
    » Firm identification questions
  – Consolidate the “open-ended” questions
  – Consider moving research evaluation questions to a “Center-level” (rather than project-level) LIFE form
    » Enhance the analysis provided from project and center-level LIFE forms
  – Current Question Length
    » Long: 44 (37 FC; 7 OE)
    » Short: 27 (20 FC; 7 OE)
  – Proposed Question Length
    » Shortened Short: 18 (15 FC; 3 OE)
    » Shortened Short sans Research: 11 (8 FC; 3 OE)
    » Center LIFE Form: 7 FC
Faculty Questionnaire

- Create a shortened version of the P/O for use during Year 1-5 by
  - Dropping questions that do not seem to provide value
  - Consolidating some multi-item “scales” into one question
  - Rely on Center Director Report for publication counts etc.

- Create a very short “what’s working, what’s not working” version of the P/O for Year 6-10

- Current Question Length
  - 29 (27 FC; 2 OE)

- Proposed Question Length
  - Short: ~15 (13 FC; 2 OE)
  - Very Short: ~ 5 (3 FC; 2 OE)
Supplemental and Targeted Studies

Periodically, the P/O questionnaires might be supplemented with additional questions to support an I/UCRC approved supplemental study.
Exit Interviews

• In spite of their intuitive value, they do not appear to currently be providing significant benefit to center stakeholders
  – Why?
    » Not done
    » Not done in a timely fashion (don’t know when they leave)
    » Information is not different from what directors already know
    » Respondents are not really forthcoming
    » Questions are not getting at real issues
    » Failure to provide aggregate analysis of them

• Options:
  – Drop and Consider an “Entrance Interview”
  – Experiment: Attempt to remedy the implementation and analysis problems and then decide whether to drop or not
    » Proposal from Meyer & Scott
LIFE Forms

- As currently used LIFE forms provide information that helps IAB and director decide on project funding priorities
- With modest analysis effort LIFE data may also provide information about member satisfaction and investment in the center
- Feedback on center-level LIFE form could be provided immediately
### LIFE Forms

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1 = Int.
2 = Inter w Change
3 = Not Int.
Other Issues

• Consider exploring methods for using more qualitative methods for collecting data
  – Center focus group on administrative and research issues

• Consider Student P/O based on Jennifer Schneider’s work in year 6-10
Conclusion

• I/UCRC Evaluation Project is a unique evaluation effort that appears to be providing value to NSF & other stakeholders

• Greatest value appears to be in providing data and feedback that helps NSF and Centers improve operations and performance

• Our recommendations are just that – recommendations
  – I/UCRC Evaluation Project could enhance those benefits by beginning to make some changes in the nature of its questionnaires and interviews and other steps

• Will need full discussion internally and consultation with key stakeholders, especially directors, in order to make this work
Next Steps

- Discuss strategy
- Discuss recommended changes and their implications
- Develop follow up plan to solicit input from other stakeholders
- Develop implementation plan for change