

**Minnesota State University, Mankato
Strategic Priority Funding
Step 2: Invited Full Proposal**

<p align="center"><i>Sub-Meet Use Only</i></p> <p align="center">7</p> <p align="center"><i>Proposal Tracking Number</i></p>

Proposal Name: Usability Center

Total Strategic Priority Funding Requested for Expenditure in FY15 (2014-2015): \$50,000

The proposed project supports the following 2010-2015 Strategic Priority: (Check all that apply)

- Applied Doctoral Institution** - Foster the thriving and robust academic culture of a university with applied doctoral programs.
- Extended Learning** - Greatly expand the reach of our extended learning programs.
- Quality and Excellence** - Measure and continuously improve our work to ensure excellence in all that we do.

What Strategic Priority Action Item(s) from the University's 2010-2015 Strategic Plan does the proposed project address (http://www.mnsu.edu/planning/strategic_plan_progress_7_1_13.pdf)?

- Identify and nurture a select number of research centers with the potential to bring in substantial external support through use of indirect cost recovery funds. (yellow)
- Provide support for graduate students' research. (red)
- Enhance research support, IT support, and other academic and technical support for graduate students. (yellow)
- Emphasize the value to undergraduates of research being conducted by our masters and doctoral students: As new knowledge is created, it immediately becomes part of the undergraduate curriculum. (red)
- Encourage faculty to develop "vertical research teams" composed of one or more faculty members, doctoral students, master's students and undergraduate students (representing first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year status) so that faculty and advanced students mentor newer and less advanced team members, who in turn become mentors when they achieve advanced status. (yellow)

Do the proposed project outcomes address any of the following Institutional Priority Measures?

If yes, check all that apply:

- Related Employment of Graduates

Are funds from any other sources needed to initiate and complete the project as proposed? (Check all that apply)

- Institutional Equipment \$ _____
- Repair and Replacement (R&R) \$ _____
- Departmental Funds \$ _____
- College or Divisional Funds \$ _____
- External/Grant Funds \$ _____
- Other: _____ \$ _____
- Other: _____ \$ _____

Proposal Contact Information and Review Signatures:

Primary Contact Name: Gretchen Perbix

Campus Mailing Address: AH 230

Primary Email Address: gretchen.perbix@mnsu.edu

Phone Number: x5506

Please note:

- Upon notification of funding, the primary contact recipient will work with the Assessment and Evaluation Sub-Meet to prepare an assessment plan. Funds will only be released upon successful completion and approval of the assessment plan.
- A Mid-Year Report will be due January 12, 2015, and an Annual Report will be due June 30, 2015.

Primary Contact Signature *Gretchen Perbix* Date 1/13/2014

Co-Applicant Name(s) and Signature(s):

Date _____
Jude Higdon

Date _____
Guarionex Salivia

Date _____
Lindsey Tollefson

I have reviewed the following proposal:

Department Director/Chair Signature* *[Signature]* Date 1/13/14

Department Director/Chair Signature* _____ Date _____

Department Director/Chair Signature* _____ Date _____

Department Director/Chair Signature* _____ Date _____

Dean Signature* *Carl R. Hill* Date 1/13/18

Dean Signature* _____ Date _____

Dean Signature* _____ Date _____

Dean Signature* _____ Date _____

Division/Vice President Signature* *[Signature]* Date 1/15/14

Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date _____

Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date _____

RECEIVED

Date Received by Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment: *JA* JAN 15 2014
(Deadline is January 15, 2014)

*Signatures needed for all affected units, departments and colleges.
Attach additional cover/signature sheets as needed.
Academic Affairs
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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 _____ Date 1/13/2014
Guarionex Salvia
Lindsey Tollefson _____ Date _____

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Guarionex Salivia Date _____

Lindsey Tollefson Date 1.14.14

I have reviewed the following proposal:

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Dean Signature* _____ Date _____

Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date 1/14/14

R. Kent Clark
Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date 1/15/14

Jeff Iseminger
Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date _____

Division/Vice President Signature* _____ Date _____

Date Received by Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment: _____

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Attach additional cover/signature sheets as needed.

Strategic Priority Funding Proposal
Full Proposal: Step 2

(Please limit the proposal narrative and attachments to 10 pages)

Proposal Name: **Usability Center**

(Increase space between questions or add pages as needed)

1. Provide a clear description of the project being proposed. (5 points)

The purpose of this project is to complete the physical build-out of the Usability Center, which is a research center, in the Academic Computing Center in Wissink Hall.

Although ITS has allocated physical space for the Center, it requires construction (walls, sound dampening) and equipment (monitors, cameras, one-way mirror) to function as a usability lab.

"Usability" refers to the ability of a product to be used easily and intuitively and is a method taught in Technical Communication and Computer and Information Science programs. While a Usability Center would function as a research center, it would also be used for classes, would be available to provide services to internal partners (ITS and Extended Learning) and internal clients (Extended Learning, Library), and would serve external clients through its partnership with Bureau 507.

Usability research that would take place at the Usability Center is applied research, which corresponds to the type of research we conduct at the University. Students and faculty in two academic programs, Technical Communication and Computer and Information Science, would be able to conduct research under the auspices of the Center, particularly pertaining to user interfaces. However, since the discipline of usability can be applied to physical objects as well, the Center's lab would also be available to support work being done in other academic programs at the University.

2. Identify the 2010-2015 Strategic Priority advanced by this project and explain the direct connection between the strategic priority and project. In addition, identify the Strategic Priority Action Item(s) [completed (green)/ in-progress (yellow)/ not yet started (red)] from the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan that the project will address (http://www.mnsu.edu/planning/strategic_plan_progress_7_1_13.pdf) (20 points)

The creation of a Usability Center corresponds to the "**Think and Act Like a Doctoral Institution**" Strategic Priority. An interdisciplinary research center, like that proposed in this project, plays a significant role in "fostering the thriving and robust academic culture of a doctoral university." It serves as a focal point for curriculum, as a cohesive function for related research projects, and as a physical place in which the students and faculty engaged in usability-related work will come together to do that work.

The creation of a Usability Center would primarily address the Strategic Priority Action Item of "providing support for graduate student research" (red) and, in the process, also support a number of other action items relevant to the "Applied Doctoral Institution" strategic priority:

- Enhance research support for graduate students (yellow)
- Emphasize the value of research to undergraduates (red)
- Encourage faculty to develop "vertical research teams" (yellow)
- Identify and nurture a select number of research centers with the potential to bring in substantial external support for research (yellow)

Provide support for graduate students' research (red)

"Providing support for graduate students' research" can take many forms. A Usability Center can provide support by demonstrating research, providing research opportunities at different levels of engagement and experience, and even offering paid opportunities to conduct research for clients (through the Center's partnership with Bureau 507).

Enhance research support, IT support, and other academic and technical support for graduate students (yellow)

Research is commonly performed by our graduate students throughout the duration of their degrees but, for many students, the starting point of research provides one of the more significant obstacles they have to overcome. Research centers serve as a means of overcoming this initial obstacle: rather than asking students to come up with their own, independent research ideas, they can begin implementing research under the auspices of others' projects. A research center enables faculty and advanced students to demonstrate to inexperienced students that research needn't be vast in scope. A research center provides significant support to beginning researchers by providing them with opportunities to execute research projects before planning research projects.

Emphasize the value of research to undergraduates (red)

One of the most rewarding challenges of teaching research skills to undergraduates is taking the abstract concept of "research" out of the domain of academics and treating it as "real world problem solving." The Usability Center would provide a site for such problem solving through its services to internal partners, internal clients, and external clients. Undergraduate students would benefit from the demonstration that "research" doesn't happen in isolation by an individual with a Ph.D., but that "research" is simply a form of problem solving, best tackled by groups, and highly relevant to their professional and pre-professional endeavors.

Encourage faculty to develop "vertical research teams" (yellow)

The idea of "vertical research teams" comes naturally to programs that offer undergraduate and graduate degrees, especially when we already offer "stacked" courses (4xx/5xx courses) that undergraduates and graduate students take simultaneously (see below for a list of courses relevant to the Usability Center, all of which are offered as stacked courses). The concept of "vertical research teams" is also akin to the way that Bureau 507 projects would be advised by a faculty member, directed by advanced students, and implemented by newer students.

Identify and nurture a select number of research centers with the potential to bring in substantial external support for research (yellow)

Although this action item was likely written with grant support in mind, the Usability Center has the opportunity to solicit external support for applied research by providing services to external clients. The type of applied research we would do for external clients would be facilitated by Bureau 507 and would provide our students with real-world experience and provide a revenue stream for the Center.

Although a Usability Center corresponds best to the "Applied Doctoral Institution" priority, the Center is also relevant to the "Quality and Excellence" and "Extended Learning" priorities. To advance the "Quality and Excellence" priority, the discipline of usability provides structured methods of gathering user-based data to inform decision-making. In that way, usability provides a method of measurement and continuous improvement by which the University can develop usable, user-friendly, and effective products such as Web sites, mobile applications, and other user interfaces. In turn, those products are essential to delivering a high-quality educational experience to online students, thus supporting the "Extended Learning" priority.

3. Describe how the project will have a significant impact on students and deliver a significant return on investment to the university. If the project is focused at the undergraduate level, please indicate how the project will address our Institutional Priority Measures of student persistence and completion, student degree completion, and/or related employment? (15 points)

The project will have an impact on our students in two ways:

- (1) The Center will directly impact undergraduate and graduate students in Technical Communication (130 students) and Computer and Information Science (150 students) who take usability-related coursework and conduct usability-related research. As an applied research method, participation in coursework and research will give those students real-world experience in usability work that will be directly applicable to employment after graduation.
 - (2) The Center will indirectly impact all of the University's students through its work with internal partners and internal clients. For example, ITS and Integrated Marketing, two partners in this proposal, create a number of web-based interfaces used by prospective and current students and alumni of the University. If those interfaces can be evaluated for their ease of use prior to their launch, the University will significantly reduce users' potential problems using those interfaces after go-live. For example: one interface design project currently under consideration is the University's homepage for mobile devices. The Center would host a project where real-life users of the homepage would participate in representative tasks on a mobile device, for example, navigate to University Admissions from the homepage. If any usability problems were identified as a result of the evaluation, they could be addressed before the mobile version of the homepage was released.
4. Identify the specific measurable outcomes that will be used to measure the impact of the project. (10 points)

The outcomes of the Center as a whole will extend beyond the outcomes of this particular project. Therefore, the specific and measurable outcomes of this project for the period of the project's award are modest and highly achievable:

- The primary outcome of the project will be the build-out (construction and equipment installation) of the physical Usability Center space.
- The Usability Center will be used by the sponsors of this proposal including Technical Communication, Computer and Information Science, Information & Technology Services, and Integrated Marketing.
- Ten courses will use the Usability center: ENG 4/562, "Document Design"; ENG 4/566, "Usability"; ENG 681, "User Experience"; IT 4/582, "Human Computer Interaction"; and IT 4/583, "Web Applications and User Interface Design."

5. Describe how the activities generated by this project will be sustained after strategic priority funding has ended, or if applicable, explain why the project does not need to be sustained. (5 points)

Strategic Priority funding is being sought for the physical build-out of the Usability Center's lab. Once the lab is complete, it will provide a centralized point for usability activities that already occur at a small scale and for an expansion of usability activities that are projected to occur.

As previously stated, ten courses will use the Center's facilities: ENG 4/562, "Document Design"; ENG 4/566, "Usability"; ENG 681, "User Experience"; IT 4/582, "Human Computer Interaction"; and IT 4/583, "Web Applications and User Interface Design." No additional funding will be necessary to use the lab in coordination with these courses.

The Center's facilities will also be used for faculty and student research. These activities are also already occurring; however, the establishment of the Center is anticipated to increase the volume of these activities. No additional funding will be necessary to use the lab for research activities.

It is also anticipated that the Center will be a key partner in the Bureau 507 initiative by providing usability services for external clients. In this case, additional funding will not be required to sustain the Center but, in fact, the Center will generate revenue.

The project will provide the basis for an applied research center that sponsors research for faculty and students and is typical of an applied doctoral institution.

The project will also provide two significant additional benefits that further demonstrate a sound return on investment:

- The Usability Center will be used to verify the quality of internal MSU projects related to online delivery of services and content.
- The center will also be used to support external relationships with organizations that would benefit from the range of services that it would provide.

6. Provide a budget justification that explains why the funding being requested is required to support the project and outline the funding requested within the budget table below. (10 points)

While physical space has been earmarked for the Center (part of the Academic Computing Center in Wissink Hall, which is owned by ITS), that space requires physical rework including wall-building, the installation of a two-way mirror, sound dampening, and lighting. The space will also require some furniture (desks, chairs) and equipment (sound and video recording, monitor displays). The basic layout of the lab is depicted below in Figure 1.

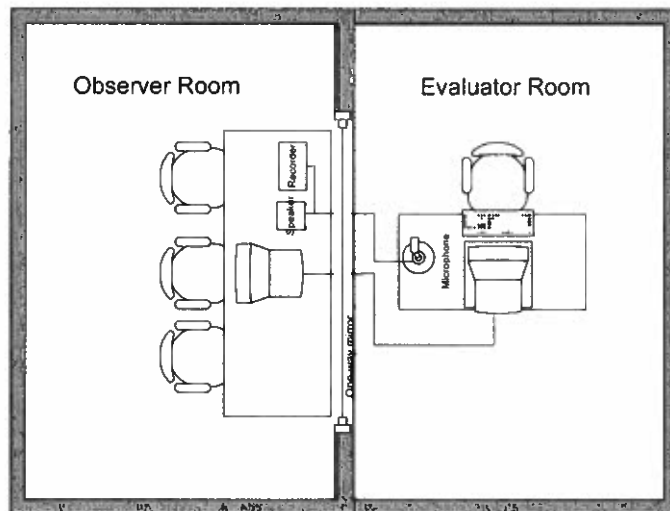


Figure 1: Basic two-room usability lab set-up. Credit: University of Minnesota

Budget table:

	FY15 SPF Funds	FY15 Funds from all Other Sources
Personnel		
Unclassified Salary (in-load, overload)		
Classified Salary		
Fringe ^a (Classified and Unclassified)		
Graduate Assistant Salary		
Graduate Assistant Tuition Reduction/Waiver ^b		
Non-Salary		
Student Help		
Purchased Services/Travel Expenses		
Supplies and Materials		
Building Improvement/Construction Costs	\$35,000	
Equipment	\$15,000	
Other (please specify)		
Total Budget/Funding Requested	\$50,000	

^aNote: All current employees must be paid fringe benefits. Fringe should be estimated based on salary and position classification: Unclassified 32%, Classified 40%, Adjunct 7.65%.

^bEstimated Tuition Reduction/Waiver for full-year enrollment: Masters \$6,600, Doctoral \$9,600.

7. Identify any special considerations or needs required for this project and how the needs will be addressed (e.g. physical space, contractual obligations, IT support, or collaborations with/implications for other units). (5 points)

The success of the project funded by this grant – the physical build-out and establishment of the Usability Center – relies on ITS's commitment to allocate the physical space for the center within the Academic Computing Center in Wissink Hall.

8. Provide a 1-year project timeline outlining key tasks and dates for completion. (5 points)

July 1 – August 1, 2014

Build-out physical space in Wissink Hall (Facilities Management)

- Wire and install lighting
- Install one-way mirror within a soundproofed wall
- Construct exterior walls and doors
- Install a countertop on the one-way mirror wall

August 1 – August 15, 2014

Procure and install equipment (EPA Audio Visual, Inc.)

- Install cameras
- Install monitors
- Install media control system