

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

October 21, 2026

MEMORANDUM

To: Teresa Cuellar, Secretary for Academic Governance
Office of Academic Governance

From: Laura Lee McIntyre, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs



Subject: Interpretation of Bylaw 2.1.1 for Non College Units

This memorandum establishes the institutional interpretation of “academic unit” under Bylaw 2.1.1 for administrative units outside the traditional college, school, and department structure. To qualify, a unit must bear primary institutional responsibility for both education **and** research or creative endeavor as an academic enterprise in its own right. This interpretation will guide current determinations and provide a framework as the University’s organization evolves.

Purpose and Scope

Bylaw 2.1.1 defines academic units as “those departments, schools, colleges, and other administrative units whose primary function is education, research, or creative endeavor.” Departments, schools, and colleges are expressly identified. This memorandum clarifies how the remaining language applies to non-college administrative units for purposes of academic governance. For this interpretation, the qualifying functions are read together: education and either research or creative endeavor.



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The interpretation builds on the working group’s August 20, 2026 recommendations and the framework presented to the Steering Committee on September 1, 2026. It addresses governance classification; it doesn’t establish a uniform definition for faculty appointments, tenure homes, budget administration, or other University policies, nor does it address the classification of centers or institutes within colleges.

Institutional Interpretation

For purposes of Bylaw 2.1.1, I interpret an “administrative unit whose primary function is education, research, or creative endeavor” as an organizational entity outside the traditional college, school, or department structure whose primary institutional purpose is to conduct or exercise substantive responsibility for both education and research or creative endeavor, as an academic enterprise in its own right. Both components must be present in the unit’s primary institutional responsibilities. Education alone, or research or creative endeavor alone, is insufficient. A unit whose primary role is to support, enable, coordinate, administer, enhance, or provide services to academic work principally carried out by others doesn’t meet this standard.

The question is what the unit itself is institutionally responsible for. An academic unit may conduct, steward, or exercise substantive direction over an academic enterprise. It need not resemble a traditional department, independently confer degrees, serve as the tenure home for faculty, or have sole authority over an academic program.

Application of the Framework

Each unit, current or future, will be assessed holistically, based on its primary function as a whole. Both education and research or creative endeavor are required; the characteristics below guide assessment of those responsibilities. The review will consider:

- **Primary purpose.** The unit's fundamental institutional function and responsibility.
- **Substantive academic responsibility.** Whether the unit conducts or bears substantive responsibility for both education and research or creative endeavor.
- **Student and learner education.** Responsibility for carrying out academic education, programs, educational experiences or academic quality for MSU students or learners beyond the University. Training or professional development for MSU faculty, instructors, or staff in their institutional roles doesn't meet this characteristic.
- **Research or creative endeavor.** Whether the unit houses, conducts, or bears substantive responsibility for a sustained research or creative enterprise, in addition to its educational responsibility. Additionally, this component includes the academic direction, standards, quality, or development of student research and creative activity, in addition to its educational responsibility.
- **Academic authority.** Substantive responsibility for programs, standards, curriculum, learning outcomes, scholarly activity, or academic quality.
- **Academic community and personnel.** Whether faculty, librarians, researchers, academic staff, students, or other academic professionals are integral to the unit's academic enterprise.
- **Academic leadership peer review and governance.** The unit has structures consistent with substantive academic responsibility.

For the education component of Bylaw 2.1.1, education encompasses academic educational activities directed to MSU students and learners beyond the University. Education, training, professional development, or consultation directed to MSU faculty, instructors, or staff in their institutional roles does not satisfy this component. Incidental educational or research activity doesn't satisfy either required component.

Academic expertise, faculty or academic staff appointments, research or instructional infrastructure, consultation or technical expertise, coordination of academic activities, incidental teaching or scholarship, and mission language describing a unit as "academic" do not independently establish academic-unit status. For units with both academic and support functions, the review will focus on the primary institutional function and responsibility of the unit as a whole.

Providing access, logistical coordination, funding, or consultation for research does not alone establish substantive academic responsibility. The assessment considers whether the unit is institutionally accountable for the academic direction, standards, quality, or development of the activity.

Determinations and Implementation

I have reviewed all non-college units reporting to the Provost's Office, units reporting to the Vice President for Research and Innovation, and other units where academic appointments reside (e.g., Inclusive Excellence and Impact). My determinations regarding which non-college units are classified as academic units are recorded in Attachment A. This classification identifies their governance status under Bylaw 2.1.1.

The Office for Academic Governance will identify the resulting governance implications and work with affected constituencies on bylaws, representation, elections, and committee participation, as applicable under the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*. Finally, I recommend that future bylaw review consider whether Bylaw 3.3.1.1 (Composition of the Faculty Senate) should distinguish non-college academic units from faculty in non-college administrative units who are represented through at-large elections. This memorandum provides interpretive guidance and does not amend the bylaws.

Attachment

Cc: John Aerni-Flessner, Faculty Senate Chair
Diana Bello-DeOcampo, UCAG Chair
Teresa Mastin, Vice Provost, FASA
Kara Yermak, Assistant Provost, FASA

Attachment A

Provost Determinations of Academic Unit Status

Applying the interpretation of Bylaw 2.1.1 set forth in this memorandum, I have determined that the non-college units listed below qualify as academic units. These determinations reflect each unit's primary institutional function and substantive responsibility for both education and research or creative endeavor under the framework described in this memorandum.

Unit name	Basis for Determination
Facility for Rare Isotope Beams	FRIB's primary institutional responsibilities encompass both education and research. is to conduct and advance a sustained research enterprise in nuclear science. It houses, directs, and conducts a sustained nuclear science research enterprise, provides undergraduate and graduate education through research experiences, scientific training, and structured mentoring. These educational responsibilities are integral to FRIB's research enterprise. These substantive academic responsibilities support its classification as an academic unit under Bylaw 2.1.1.
Libraries	The MSU Libraries' institutional responsibilities encompass both academic education and research. Librarians provide instruction in information literacy and research methods and contribute new knowledge through their own research and scholarly work. These educational and research responsibilities, reinforced by established academic personnel and governance structures, support classification as an academic unit under Bylaw 2.1.1. The determination rests on these substantive responsibilities collectively, rather than on collections, research support services, or personnel titles alone.
Undergraduate Education (and all units reporting to UE)	Undergraduate Education bears substantive institutional responsibility for both undergraduate education and undergraduate research and creative activity. Its responsibilities encompass undergraduate academic policies, educational programs, and academic quality, together with stewardship of undergraduate research and creative activity through the Undergraduate Research Office. These integrated responsibilities support classification as an academic unit under Bylaw 2.1.1.