



University

Western Carolina University

Center Director

Patrick Gardner

Center Location

College of Engineering

Center since 2009

Center Activities

- New product development
- Business plan assistance
- Networking
- Process improvements
- CEDS assistance

Clients

- Entrepreneurs
- Start-ups
- Existing businesses
- Local and regional communities

Assessment Techniques

- Feedback from staff
- Client interviews
- Feedback at regional workshops
- Client satisfaction surveys
- Case studies

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The EDA University Center of Western Carolina University

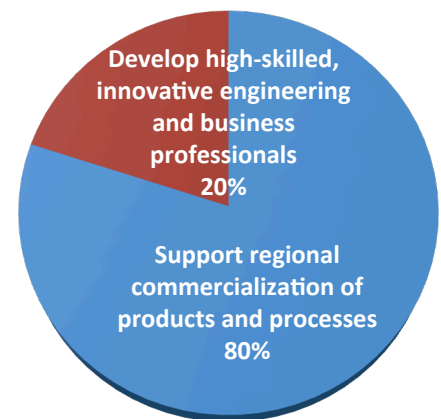
Western Carolina University's (WCU) University Center is host by the Kimmel School's Center for Rapid Product Realization in collaboration with the Small Business and Technology Development Center and the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. The Center strives to facilitate the commercialization of new products or services that retain current jobs and/or add new jobs for existing businesses, as well as create new jobs in emerging entrepreneurial ventures.

Activities

The Center provides assistance to inventors and businesses through a commercialization process that has two major phases: a proof of concept phase and an implementation or launch phase. Specifically, the Center provides clients with business creation and growth services during the proof of concept phase by the counselors at the Small Business and Technology Development Center and the faculty and students affiliated with the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Services include

market and economic feasibility studies that demonstrate the need for and the efficacy of new products and services. For those commercialization clients that require technical assistance, the Rapid Center offers engineering services including design, reverse engineering, prototyping, quality testing, and manufacturing.

In the implementation phase, the Center provides assistance in preparing



business plans and pro forma financials needed for the client to successfully obtain financing to begin or expand operations. In addition, the Center connects client to funding sources as well as prepares them to present to these funding sources. The Center also provides assistance to existing business

with implementing improvements in productivity and quality and provides technical assistance in energy management and efficiency improvements.

Leveraging

The Center extensively leverages the expertise of its partners, the Small Business and Technology

Development Center

and the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. These partnerships allow the Center to provide expertise to its clients that it may not be able to

support on the EDA grant alone. In addition, the Center leverages relationships with a local angel investor group to help their clients find venture funding.

"This is a vital program which has benefited my company greatly, it should be duplicated around the country to assist other entrepreneurs and inventors like myself."

--Center Client

The Center leverages university resources such as data sources and the technology transfer office. The Center draws from leadership

expertise in the College of Business (market assessment, market strategy, business planning) and both the College of Health and Human Science (medical rehabilitation, physical therapy applications) and the College of Arts and Sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics). The Center extensively leverages student labor through the organizing of engineering capstone projects, where teams of students are lead by faculty to solve a problem for a company or create a market study or business plan.

Success

Using student and faculty teams to do more

The Center for Rapid Product Realization has a strong history of using its student, faculty, and staff teams to help clients refine existing products, develop new products, and improve business practices. One successful project was recently profiled on the UNC snapshots blog of The University of North Carolina. The project was with the Murphy, NC-based Moog Components Group, which makes precision motors. Precision motors' quality requirements are very high, so each one must be tested before it is shipped. The company worked with

the student team to design and prototype a faster way of certifying each electric motor. The procedure will allow Moog to ship motors more quickly, which may open the door for expansion. The client needs are met, and the students have learned from a real world problem.

The Center has shown how students and external clients can both be served by a program that is targeted on client need and which closely directs student contributions.

Providing assistance with energy management and efficiency improvements saves jobs

Stanley Furniture's Robbinsville, NC site is the only large employer for economically distressed Graham County and when discussions on relocating the plant surfaced, WCU's center worked with local, county and state partners to provide guidance and technical assistance, which helped retain the plant and 42 jobs. The plant's energy needs and requirements were assessed and a thorough analysis was delivered to management to demonstrate practical methods to reduce energy costs and improve the profitability of the plant. Today, the plant is still the only major employer and economic driver in Graham County.