



August 20, 2008

Board of Regents
University of Wisconsin System
c/o Judith A. Temby, Secretary
1860 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison 53706

Dear Regent President Bradley and Members of the Board:

We write on a matter of critical importance to the future of our institution.

Today, UW-Madison enjoys an international reputation as one of the world's great research universities. Much of this reputation rests on the high quality of our graduate students. These students come from Wisconsin and beyond, and they are an essential part of the equation that has made our university one of the world's best public institutions of higher learning. In the world of research, graduate students play an essential role, helping us expand the margins of knowledge and make the critical discoveries that firmly establish Wisconsin as a research powerhouse. Graduate students lead in the classroom, and they nurture the next generation of researchers by example and through the mentoring of undergraduates. By doing so, they encourage many promising students to pursue advanced degrees and careers that require a high degree of technical training.

In short, graduate students are an integral part of our success as a research university.

For decades, UW-Madison has been regarded as a coveted destination for the world's best graduate students. Many stay in Wisconsin and contribute to the economic, civic and intellectual well-being of our state through work in industry and, increasingly, as entrepreneurs setting the stage for our new economy.

While some graduate students continue their careers elsewhere, their accomplishments contribute to the greater good and reflect well on the investment Wisconsin has made in higher education. The 1999 Nobel Prize in medicine and physiology, for example, was awarded to UW alumnus Günter Blobel for his discoveries of the role of proteins in critical cell functions. His work had an immediate bearing on many diseases, including cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's disease and AIDS. Blobel, who received a doctorate from UW-Madison in 1966, is now the head of the Laboratory of Cell Biology at Rockefeller University. He considers his graduate training at Wisconsin, made possible by a graduate fellowship, as a critical turning point in his career, an opportunity that set him firmly on the path to his breathtaking discoveries of proteins and cell function.

It is important to recognize that the best graduate students help to set UW-Madison apart among research universities. Wisconsin has consistently ranked among the top five research institutions in terms of extramural support. Reaching that level most certainly depends in part on the involvement and efforts of our top-tier graduate students.

The caliber of Wisconsin graduate students is a key reason that we choose to do our work here. But this important element of our success is now at risk. Increasing competition from other schools, coupled with emerging financial constraints, make it difficult for us to attract the very best students. Graduate programs

that are unable to offer competitive fellowships, quite simply, cannot compete. The best students — just like top athletes — are a valued commodity, and they receive multiple offers from universities, including fellowships, assistantships, waivers of tuition and other benefits, as they explore their options.

Wisconsin must invest in graduate education to retain our standing as a top research university. Many of our faculty members are successful in obtaining training grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy and other federal programs. These grants ensure that we can establish and maintain programs that, in turn, enable us to effectively recruit and train top students. Quite often, successful training grant proposals depend upon institutional matching funds. These matching funds, as represented by the \$5.25 million in the UW-Madison Graduate Education Initiative in the 2009-11 UW System biennial budget request, are absolutely necessary if we are to remain competitive. We are concerned that without this support, private institutions with larger endowments will overtake our efforts and federal funds for graduate training at Wisconsin will be lost. Should that happen, our ability to successfully recruit the best students will be significantly diminished and our university's place as one of America's best research institutions will be at risk.

We appreciate the many legitimate demands for limited resources. However, we are firm in our belief that this is a wise investment — not only for our university, but also for the economic well-being and high quality of life for the citizens of Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

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and Oncology
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