

**MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION COMMITTEE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM BOARD OF REGENTS**

Thursday, February 4, 2021
WebEx Videoconference

Regent Bob Atwell called the meeting to order at 8:53 a.m. Regents Cris Peterson, Eve Hall, and Becky Lezvow were present. Regent Kyle Weatherly joined following a short delay due to technical issues. Regent Atwell provided an opportunity for committee members to declare any conflicts of interest; none were so stated.

a. Approval of the minutes of the December 10, 2020 meeting.

On a motion by Regent Peterson and seconded by Regent Lezvow, the minutes of the December 10, 2020, REDI Committee meeting were unanimously approved.

b. UW-Madison – Continuing Research Response to COVID-19

Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education Steve Ackerman introduced the topic with an overview of the substantial and broad range of research activities UW-Madison researchers engage in to address the impacts of COVID-19. He said researchers at UW-Madison have focused their efforts on better understanding the virus and mitigating its impact on families, our economy, and the environment.

Researcher Song Gao of UW-Madison’s Geospatial Data Science Lab highlighted the mapping of human mobility for geospatial modeling of COVID-19 spread. Through the study of anonymized mobile phone data, Dr. Song was able to map human mobility in Dane County to understand how human travel impacts the spread of the virus. His research showed the importance of early isolation and quarantining to limit spread. UW Health researcher Nasia Safdar discussed innovative strategies for the prevention of COVID-19 within healthcare systems. Using viral genomic sequencing, Dr. Safdar’s research showed that because of the conscientious use of personal protective equipment (PPE) while at work, infection rates of healthcare employees in the workplace tends to be low and that the highest risk of exposure comes from contact outside of work with family and community members. She said familiarity tends to foster comfort and lowers individual desire to “protect” from infection.

All told, the UW-Madison campus is working diligently on a full range of COVID-19 research initiatives, with more than 72 programs currently in progress across a wide range of disciplines. UW-Madison COVID-19 research activity has attracted \$53 million in funding across 40 departments on campus.

Regent Levzow thanked the UW-Madison presenters and noted her work in the healthcare industry. She indicated that she often feels “safer at work” than when elsewhere because of the protections in place on the job. Regent Hall expressed appreciation for the UW-Madison update and inquired about how best to speed the rollout of the vaccine among minority groups. Dr. Safdar pointed out that the expansion of vaccine sites to community pharmacies was a step in the right direction.

c. Business and University Perspectives on Generating Vibrant and Sustainable Economic Growth Through Innovative Health and Wellness Initiatives:

The pandemic has increased overall awareness of the importance and benefits of personal health and wellness. One potential silver lining of COVID has been an increase in outdoor activities and recreational pursuits, and a renewed focus on the value of healthy lifestyles. To provide a business perspective, Saris Founder and CEO Chris Fortune was invited to describe his Madison-based bicycle company’s efforts to replace fossil-fuel delivery systems with pedal power. Saris believes that being outside contributes to increased mental health. CEO Chris Fortune and Mike Basarich, Saris Director of Infrastructure, described the work of the Bikes for Kids Foundation through which Saris provides planning and funding to support urban bike parks for underserved youth. Working with local police departments, Boys and Girls Club organizations, and other community organizations, Saris is developing five new bike parks this year in Wisconsin. Additionally, the company is working with university researchers and Wisconsin communities to improve urban bikeways and traffic patterns.

From an academic perspective, UW-Milwaukee Provost Johannes Britz provided an overview of the university’s urban research setting as a “lab for learning” that sets the stage for improving the quality of life and health of all city residents. Dr. Britz said UWM offers the largest number of health-related degree programs in Wisconsin. Jean Bell-Calvin described UWM’s community nursing outreach which has built partnerships over the past four decades to serve high-needs areas within the city. She and UWM student Morgan Jenswold described the benefits of the work being done through the 800+ clinical and community health-related professional outreach programs. These efforts include internships and volunteer student placements on service projects in underserved neighborhoods. Their comments underscored the deep and caring connections UWM provides to its neighbors and community partners.

Regents Petersen commented on the inspirational work derived from UWM research. Regent Hall noted the power of the university with much of its benefit often occurring quietly and behind the scenes. She urged presenters to continue to get the word out regarding UWM’s positive impact on the community. In closing, Regent Atwell noted that REDI’s discussions highlighted prime examples of what

President Thompson calls the New Wisconsin Idea, as UW System campuses and their community partners combine the power of research and collaboration to improve lives and to build a strong economic future for all Wisconsin residents.

d. The meeting was adjourned at 10:01 a.m.