

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

Thursday, July 8, 2021

UW-Madison Gordon Event Center and WebEx Videoconference

Regent Bob Atwell called the meeting to order at 10:45 a.m. Regents Cris Peterson, Becky Levzow and Héctor Colón were present. Because of a campus-related power outage, Student Regent Brianna Tucker and others who planned to join REDI via WebEx were unable to access the live meeting proceedings. Regent Atwell provided an opportunity for committee members present to declare any conflicts of interest; none were so stated.

**a. Approval of the minutes of the June 3, 2021 meeting.**

On a motion by Regent Peterson and seconded by Regent Levzow, the minutes of June 3, 2021, REDI Committee meeting were unanimously approved.

**b. WiSys: Future-Focused Research and Industry Collaboration Drive Innovation and Economic Competitiveness**

**Faculty and Students – Regent Scholars, Undergraduate Research and Entrepreneurship**

The campus power loss prevented REDI from launching the planned virtual presentations from three UW System Regent Scholar faculty researchers and from several undergraduate student entrepreneurs and innovators, including the WiSys Quick Pitch statewide champion. Regent Atwell apologized for the outage and suggested the committee should revisit these topics and hear faculty and student perspectives at a future meeting.

**Chancellor Panel – Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

The outage created an opportunity to expand the WiSys panel discussion with four UW System Chancellors who were on site for the meeting. Led by WiSys Advisory Board Chair Deborah Ford, the panel included Chancellor Andrew Leavitt, UW Oshkosh; Chancellor Katherine Frank, UW-Stout; and Chancellor James Schmidt, UW-Eau Claire.

Chancellor Ford prefaced the panel discussion with her observations that WiSys provides a unique opportunity for the 11 comprehensive universities to share a unique and award-winning set of resources that build capacity and promote a culture of undergraduate research and community service. She conveyed a deep appreciation for such resources which can be found in few other higher educational systems anywhere in the United States.

Chancellor Leavitt offered a powerful example of how WiSys not only helps to recognize and foster innovation, but also serves as a “powerful tool to attract and retain” faculty. He related his own experience in another university system, when, as a young faculty inventor, he was unable to obtain a patent for the design of a new lab instrument because there were no resources available within his university for that purpose. Chancellor Leavitt’s point was that he could have patented the device in Wisconsin because WiSys would have helped make it possible.

Panelist Katherine Frank said that WiSys not only provides support for faculty and student research, but also provides UW-Stout with visibility into best practices of other campuses and in other states that would otherwise not be available. She noted that WiSys additionally provides support for faculty in their efforts to seek out and secure additional grant funding from other public and private organizations. She also emphasized that WiSys has been a significant factor in the success of at least 12 new on-line App programs that have been developed on her campus.

UW-Eau Claire Chancellor Jim Schmidt pointed out that undergraduate research is “in the DNA” of his campus and that UWEC has been recognized as the leading comprehensive for undergraduate research in the U.S. WiSys has helped to “open the silos” and help the campus better connect and collaborate with the community. Eau Claire also serves as the site for the first WiSys VentureHome innovation lab established in 2020 with local and regional innovators and business partners. Due in part to the strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem that WiSys helped the university build in the Chippewa Valley, UW-Eau Claire has been selected to host the national conference of undergraduate researchers in 2023, expected to draw 4000 faculty and students to the region from across the country.

Commenting on the strength and effectiveness of WiSys, Regent Cris Peterson asked how WiSys is working to increase the awareness of its benefits on campus and across the state. Chancellor Ford pointed out that WiSys student ambassadors and regional research associates work as “boots on the ground” to spread the word on every campus and with community partners. Regent Colón emphasized the longer term advantage for using WiSys to support a more strategic alignment of resources to support faculty and student innovation.

When asked by Regent Atwell for self-assessments of the work done to date, the Chancellor panelists and WiSys President Arjun Sanga agreed that significant progress has been made towards achieving their own collective “high bar for achievement,” but there is still room to grow. It was also noted that in mid-June, Chancellor Ford, WiSys President Sanga, and UW System Tommy Thompson had been invited to present the WiSys case study as a global “Good Practice” at the annual conference of the University-Industry Innovation Network based in Amsterdam.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m.