

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

Thursday, February 10, 2022
UW-Madison and WebEx Videoconference

REDI Vice Chair Cris Peterson called the meeting to order at 10:52 a.m.

Regents Brianna Tucker and Karen Walsh were present; Rodney Pasch joined via Webex. Regents Atwell and Colón were absent. Regent Peterson provided an opportunity for committee members to declare any conflicts of interest; none were so stated.

a) Approval of the minutes of the December 9, 2021, meeting

The minutes of the December 9, 2021, REDI Committee meeting were unanimously approved on a motion by Regent Tucker and seconded by Regent Peterson.

b) UW-Madison: Highlighting the Impact of Groundbreaking Biotechnology Research

Chancellor Rebecca Blank made opening remarks for the third in a series of important research updates. The focus was on innovative ways the flagship is positively impacting health care advancements and expanding economic and community development—the Wisconsin Idea in action. Through the years, more than 400 new businesses have been formed that are based upon UW intellectual property and the work of UW faculty, staff, and students. Today, these businesses generate more than \$10 billion in economic activity annually, create more than 42,000 jobs, and generate more than \$320 million in state and local income taxes for Wisconsin each year.

The Chancellor’s remarks were followed with a progress report from Aaron Olver, who leads the University Research Park, where many of the businesses got their start. This internationally recognized research and technology park nurtures early-stage and growth-oriented businesses across a range of sectors and over a period of many years. By way of example, Olver noted that when Exact Sciences came to the Research Park, its forecast was for the eventual hire of 100 employees. Today, the firm has more than 3,600 employees in Madison and more overseas.

A second presenter, Sara Pirnstill, provided an overview of her impressive work at Stratetech, a company based in the research park. The company has developed a synthetic skin-graft replacement material for burn victim treatment which has revolutionized the standard of care for improving recovery from serious injuries. This innovation grew out of a UW–Madison discovery in 1996. Regent Walsh remarked about the impressive regenerative capabilities of the new product, and how it surpasses the benefits of cadaver skin. It traditionally has been used to protect burn areas during the healing process but is not able to regenerate growth on its own like the Stratetech product can.

The committee also heard from Dr. Michael Sussman, who has been at UW for four decades. His presentation highlighted the “past, present and future” of university research. One company he helped to found early in his career, Nimble Gen, was sold for \$270 million, and has opened the door to personalized medicine—a standard protocol for many treatments today. Now, Dr. Sussman’s team is developing a blood test for predicting colon cancer earlier and more effectively.

Looking to the future, Dr. Sussman talked about the promise of expanding numerous innovative “hyperimmune” treatments that can be derived from the natural antigens found in hens’ eggs. His interdisciplinary team is directing its energies toward using this research to help detect and fight cancers in ways yet untold. Regent Pasch complimented the work and said that efforts to work with small, rural farms to develop and adapt these antigens would be a prime example of the Wisconsin Idea at work to benefit state residents wherever they may live. Regent Peterson encouraged the presenters to do everything possible to build more widespread awareness of the Wisconsin Idea across the entire state by raising awareness of innovative projects like those highlighted by UW-Madison during at REDI.

c) Corporate Research and Clinical Trial Contracting Processes and Approvals Presentation and Discussion

Vice Chancellor Steve Ackerman described UW-Madison’s capabilities as a powerhouse of university research, producing new discoveries across a broad range of disciplines and making it a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. He said extramural research grant funding exceeds \$1.5 billion across UW System each year and that it is becoming an increasingly important source of revenue for university researchers systemwide. Traditionally, the largest source of grant funding has been from the federal government, but with a significant and increasing proportion coming from private industry.

From a policy perspective, Vice Chancellor Ackerman’s discussion highlighted the need for finding new ways to facilitate these important research advances, including the need to streamline the university’s approval process for grant funding. Pointing out the clearest pathways to progress, he noted that the Office of Business Engagement is focused on expanding collaboration with private partners, eliminating bottlenecks, and improving the university’s responsiveness to accommodate industry partners. As an added benefit, he said success breeds success in this regard, with increases in industry collaboration helping to attract additional top-notch researchers and graduate students to further the momentum.

Ackerman said that in comparison to peer research-driven institutions in the Big 10 and elsewhere, the UW flagship has a long way to go. Other Big 10 schools, for example, are able to review and finalize contracts much more expeditiously. He said that improving the approval processes at UW System will facilitate the intake of cutting-edge research projects and accelerate the impact of the Wisconsin Idea. Regent Peterson and Regent Pasch indicated their support of policy changes to expedite approval flows and to remove bottlenecks, leading to new opportunity for UW.

Regent Peterson thanked the presenters and adjourned the meeting at 10:00 a.m.