



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #811

School of Freshwater Sciences (UW System)

[LFB 2009-11 Budget Summary: Page 659, #20]

CURRENT LAW

The Board of Regents may not create a new school with academic programs at the graduate, professional, or post-baccalaureate level unless specifically authorized by the Legislature to do so.

GOVERNOR

Permit the Board of Regents to create a school of freshwater sciences at UW-Milwaukee.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Pending the approval of the Legislature, the UW Board of Regents approved the establishment of a School of Freshwater Sciences at UW-Milwaukee in June, 2008. According to Regents' materials, the mission of the School of Freshwater Sciences would be to advance, create, and disseminate new knowledge that would protect, restore, and sustain the health and well-being of freshwaters and the lives of people and other living beings dependent upon them. The School would offer a Ph.D. and a Master's degree in Freshwater Sciences. Although the School would not offer a bachelor's degree, undergraduate students majoring in related fields would have the opportunity to engage in the School's research projects.

2. The proposed School of Freshwater Sciences would be the first school of its kind in the United States. According to Regents' materials, there are seven degree-granting programs that focus on freshwater sciences in this country. None of these programs are located in the Midwest; similarly, none focus on the Great Lakes. Internationally, there are three schools similar to the one proposed by UW-Milwaukee and 115 degree granting programs focusing on freshwater sciences.

3. The proposed School of Freshwater Sciences would build on the existing Great Lakes WATER (Wisconsin Aquatic Technology and Environmental Research) Institute. The WATER Institute is the home of the Center for Great Lakes Studies, which was established in 1966 and is organized under UW-Milwaukee's Graduate School. The facility, which includes 88,000 square feet of laboratory, office, and storage space, is located on the Milwaukee harbor and has 1,300 feet of deep harbor frontage. The Institute's primary research vessel is the R/V Neeksay, a 71 foot former Army transport vessel converted for use by WATER Institute scientists in 1970.

4. At present, the WATER Institute has 26.25 FTE positions including: 2.25 faculty members, who have joint appointments with other academic units; 17 academic staff positions, including 12 Ph.D. scientists; and 7 classified staff members. In addition, 11 graduate students and 20 temporary research staff members work at the WATER Institute. These additional positions are supported by extramural funding, including federal grants and private contracts. From 2004 to 2006, the WATER Institute was awarded an average of \$3.3 million annually in extramural funding. In 2008-09, the WATER Institute has a GPR budget of \$2.5 million.

5. Currently, faculty and researchers who may be involved in freshwater research are spread across several different departments including biology, chemistry, geosciences, and engineering. By creating a School of Freshwater Sciences, UW-Milwaukee could bring a diverse set of faculty and research academic staff into one academic unit focused on freshwater sciences. By bringing these faculty and research academic staff members together, it is anticipated that School of Freshwater Sciences would be able to raise more private funds to support this research and attract more extramural funding to UW-Milwaukee.

6. As proposed, the School of Freshwater Sciences would have a relationship with the proposed UW-Milwaukee School of Public Health. The two schools would partner to study issues related to the environment and environmental health. These issues, which would derive from water resource problems, would include historical chemical pollution from PCBs, mercury, and other contaminants, new sources of pollution by pharmaceuticals and personal care products, invasive species and exotic pathogens, and sewer overflows.

7. As proposed, the School of Freshwater Sciences would have initial core faculty of 8.25 positions. This would not require additional resources as six faculty positions would be filled by the appointment of six of the current Ph.D.-level scientists employed by the WATER Institute to faculty positions. According to Regents' materials, a dean for the School would be hired during the 2008-09 year using base funds reallocated for that purpose by the campus. However, a dean for the School has not yet been hired at this time.

8. In its agency budget request, the Board of Regents requested \$1,000,000 and 7.0 positions in 2010-11 for the proposed School of Freshwater Sciences. The requested positions would have included five additional faculty positions and two additional support staff positions. AB 75 would not add funding to support the proposed School of Freshwater Sciences. Regents' materials indicate that the School of Freshwater Sciences would be fully operational in the absence of the requested funding and positions; however, projected growth in extramural funding for the

School would be slower.

9. As outlined in the Regents materials, the core faculty and academic staff of the School of Freshwater Sciences would be supported by base GPR funding currently allocated to the existing WATER Institute. AB 75 would reduce the GPR base budget for the UW System by \$120 million. According to UW System Administration, it is anticipated that UW-Milwaukee's GPR budget would be reduced by \$15.7 million over the biennium as a result of these base budget reductions. It is unclear how these reductions in base GPR funding for UW-Milwaukee would affect the proposed School of Freshwater Sciences. Given the current economic downturn and the proposed reductions to the UW System's budget, it may be undesirable to authorize a new school at UW-Milwaukee.

10. In April, the State Building Commission approved its capital budget recommendations for the 2009-11 biennium. Included in the Building Commission's recommendations is an enumeration of \$240,000,000 for the Milwaukee master plan initiative. This amount would include funding related to the proposed School of Freshwater Sciences. This funding could be used to renovate the existing WATER Institute facility and to acquire a new research vessel to replace the R/V Neeksay. It is also possible that some portion of this funding could be used to construct a new facility related to the School of Freshwater Sciences. At this point, it is unclear how much of the proposed funding would be used for projects related to the School of Freshwater Sciences as opposed to other projects included in the master plan initiative.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation.
2. Delete provision.

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