



**Legislative Council Study Committee**  
**The Future of the University of Wisconsin System**

October 24, 2024

Chair Nedweski and members of the Legislative Council Study Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this memo in response to the proposals released by the Legislative Council Study Committee on the Future of the University of Wisconsin System for consideration by the committee at your meeting on October 24, 2024. UW-Madison appreciates the committee's efforts and interest in working on higher education issues and exploring potential solutions to some of the challenges facing our public system of higher education in Wisconsin. Due to the breadth and range of issues represented in the proposals, this memo will only focus on a few key priorities and responding to some reoccurring themes.

**Proposal #1: Separate UW-Madison from UW System**

It is true that UW-Madison has different opportunities and challenges than Wisconsin's comprehensive universities. It is vitally important that these challenges continue to be addressed, both for UW-Madison's future and the future of our public universities. We believe it is not only possible but preferable to address these issues and these differences within our existing governance structures. UW-Madison appreciates the discussion around some of these reforms including limited program revenue bonding authority, cash management adjustments, and purchasing/procurement changes. These more limited reforms would have a meaningful impact on our operations and represent significant improvement in existing processes that would allow us to make better use of our resources and would support our greater success and excellence.

**Proposal #4: Provide UW System or UW-Madison Only with Limited Bonding Authority**

As many members of the committee have pointed out, UW-Madison is the only flagship university without some form of this flexibility. We believe that there are many potential plausible pilots for a form of bonding authority, and we recognize that there would need to be appropriate guardrails. For example: a pilot could support this flexibility for forms of program revenue that are NOT taxpayer funds or resources, and construction management could remain within the Department of Administration (DOA). We recognize the need for some form of reasonable gubernatorial and legislative oversight through passive review or through other workable governance mechanisms would also be appropriate.

### **Proposals #10, #14: Distribution of GPR Funding**

UW-Madison is the flagship institution of public higher education in Wisconsin. UW-Madison has a unique and comprehensive mission that includes teaching, world-class research, and service. Our work is motivated by the Wisconsin Idea and has deep and lasting impacts on our Wisconsin communities, industries, and citizens. UW-Madison is home of the Division of Extension, which provides services and resources in all of Wisconsin's 72 counties. Through the College of Agricultural & Life Sciences (CALS), UW-Madison operates twelve agricultural research stations in communities around the state.

Overhauling the GPR allocation formula on a per pupil basis would not accurately reflect the significant range of activities of our flagship, land-grant mission, along with the breadth of professional programming on our campus. UW-Madison represents the only veterinary medical school in the state and the only public schools of medicine and pharmacy. These types of programs are exceedingly competitive and expensive to operate. Many of these schools and colleges are established by an act of the State Legislature and are an important part of the state's history of growing the flagship university.

The return of Wisconsin's investment in UW-Madison is significant. UW-Madison and affiliated organizations and start-ups make up nearly 9 percent—over \$30 billion—of the state's nearly \$350 billion economy. This economic activity supports more than 232,000 jobs, roughly 1 out of every 13 jobs in the state. For every \$1 of public tax investment in the university, over \$26 is put back into the state's economy. In addition to being an over \$1 billion-dollar research engine, UW-Madison continues to produce ideas and investments that solve some of the biggest challenges at home and across the globe.

With the Universities of Wisconsin ranking 43rd out of 50 states nationally for public university funding, an effort to reshuffle existing GPR allocations to Wisconsin universities would miss the big picture and key issue: overall funding to our universities significantly lags the investments made elsewhere. Instead, given the fundamental ways that Universities of Wisconsin campuses contribute to the education of citizens and the state's workforce, to innovation and economic development, and to the quality of life in Wisconsin, we must instead commit to increasing overall investment in higher education in a partnership with the state that is now more than 175 years in the making.

### **Proposal #21: Limit UW Position Authority**

As proposed, this will greatly impede our ability to move quickly on hiring strong candidates and hinder our ability to remain competitive for important roles that are not necessarily faculty members and teaching staff. Some top researchers at UW-Madison do not necessarily teach classes and are not tenured faculty. We are also currently amid implementation of the agreed upon position cap systemwide until 2026. Additionally, as part of the Madison labor market, an accurate reflection of competitive salary is not the median income of the entire state. We are competing against the rest of the public sector as well as the private sector for the best and brightest employees and team members. If the goal is for UW-Madison to remain competitive on a national and international level, this proposal is counterintuitive to recruiting researchers and other non-teaching staff.

## Other Proposals

**Proposal #20 (uniform course numbering)** has been discussed in previous legislative sessions (2019 Assembly Bill 371). While UW-Madison acknowledges the need for continued coordination with our colleagues in technical college system to improve transferability for students and families, a uniform course numbering system would not necessarily guarantee transferability of credits between higher education systems and institutions while creating large technical and administrative challenges. Nearly 100,000 course credits are transferred to UW-Madison annually. Most of these courses do not have and could not have the same number as the course the students took at another institution. Course numbers are not a factor in determining the transferability of courses. A uniform system has the potential to create more confusion, it could mislead students and families into thinking certain courses transfer when they do not.

There are also a set of recommendations that attempt to address issues around transparency (**Proposals #7, 10, 15**). As a public institution, there are statutorily required reporting to the State Legislature and the federal government. However, UW-Madison stands ready to work with elected officials and others to provide a clear understanding of the various funding sources and use of resources to support our \$4 billion annual operation in support of more than 50,000 students and a campus community that includes teaching, research, innovation, a Big 10 athletic program, and student support.

Again, UW-Madison appreciates the committee's work and interest in potential solutions to the challenges facing the university system in Wisconsin. We stand ready to continue the conversations with elected officials and other stakeholders in our shared goal of a strong UW-Madison. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this memo to members of the committee in response to the proposals released by the committee for consideration today. If you have any questions, please reach out to the UW-Madison State Relations team, Crystal Potts and Mitch Goettl ([crystal.potts@wisc.edu](mailto:crystal.potts@wisc.edu); [goettl@wisc.edu](mailto:goettl@wisc.edu); 608-265-4105).