
Wisconsin Legislative Council

MINUTES



STUDY COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

Room 411 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI
October 24, 2024
10:00 a.m. – 2:41 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Nedweski called the meeting to order and determined that a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Rep. Amanda Nedweski, Chair; Sen. Cory Tomczyk, Vice Chair; Rep. Alex Joers; Sen. Chris Larson; and Public Members Scott Beightol, Shauna Froelich, William Hsu, Peter Kies, Cecelia Klingele, James Langdon, Jerome Lippert, Betsy Morgan, Janice Mueller, Ananth Seshadri, and Robert Venable.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED: Public Members Robert Atwell, Kurt Bauer, and S. Mark Tyler.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Katie Bender-Olson, Principal Attorney; and Emily Hicks, Staff Attorney.

ATTENTION:	This was the final meeting of the Study Committee on the Future of the University of Wisconsin System. Committee members are requested to send any corrections regarding minutes to the Legislative Council staff. After the incorporation of any corrections, these minutes will be considered approved by the committee.
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APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 26, 2024 MEETING

Mr. Venable moved to approve the meeting minutes from September 26, 2024. The motion was seconded by Mr. Seshadri and the committee approved them by unanimous consent.

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRIBUTED MATERIALS BY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STAFF

Emily Hicks, Legislative Council staff, briefly described the materials distributed to members in advance of the meeting and posted on the committee website, as well as the materials distributed for the first time at the meeting in hard copy. She noted that Memo No. 2, distributed prior to the meeting, was generated by Legislative Council staff and all other materials were generated by Chair Nedweski,

committee members, University of Wisconsin (UW) System, UW-Madison, and interested members of the public.

PRESENTATION BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

Chair Nedweski opened the meeting with comments regarding the presentation provided by NCHEMS at the previous meeting in September. She then presented a PowerPoint entitled “UW System Funding Trends 1984-2021.” In the presentation, Chair Nedweski provided counterpoints to specific claims regarding the funding of the UW System. She addressed and refuted statements regarding Wisconsin’s ranking for higher education funding in the nation, lifetime net private returns on a four-year bachelor’s degree, the need for a bachelor’s degree or higher to obtain a “good” job in the future, the amount of general purpose revenue (GPR) dedicated to the UW System over time, the amount of GPR per student provided over time, and the idea that GPR per student must increase to account for higher instructional costs driven by wages. Chair Nedweski concluded her presentation by outlining her conclusions and recommendations, such as the need to improve trust between UW, the Legislature, and all stakeholders with more transparency and accountability, and having UW partner more effectively with technical colleges and private businesses to offer programming that fits a need.

Following the presentation, committee members posed questions to Chair Nedweski regarding the origins of the presentation’s source material, the value of undergraduate degrees, and the Consumer Price Index data.

DISCUSSION OF COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT

Chair Nedweski initiated committee discussion of proposed recommendations outlined within a ballot distributed to members at the outset of the meeting. She explained that a “yes” vote on individual proposals indicates the member believes the Legislature should spend time exploring the proposal, and a “no” vote means the member does not endorse the Legislature exploring the idea. Chair Nedweski explained that the ballot results will be compiled into a report that is submitted to the Legislature, and that the way individual members vote will be tallied and made public.

The committee members discussed proposed recommendations numbered from one to 19, in order. Chair Nedweski initiated discussion of proposed recommendation #1, which is to explore separating UW-Madison from the other 12 comprehensive campuses. Individual members commented on their individual preferences regarding a separation, such as noting the benefit to the 12 other comprehensives of having a Board of Regents to focus on their challenges and needs, a preference for the new office to be located in Milwaukee, and the prevalence of a separate board governance model for top research universities.

The members briefly discussed proposed recommendation #2, which is to explore creating a Higher Education Coordinating Council. The members then moved to discussion of recommendation #3, which proposes exploring revisions to the current Board of Regents membership. Members made comments both in support and in opposition to appointing more legislative members to the Board, and discussed the impact it would have on the Board’s activities and relationship with the Legislature.

The committee then addressed proposed recommendation #4, a proposal to explore granting limited bonding authority to UW-Madison or to the entire UW System. Several members indicated a preference to limit bonding authority to UW-Madison and requested a unanimous vote from the committee.

Next, the committee discussed proposed recommendation #5, related to increased tuition. Mr. Seshadri noted that tuition does not prevent access for low-income students because of specific programs that exist to assist these students, and that price controls are not necessary to control price gouging. Members noted that the Board of Regents currently has discretion to raise tuition and to create differential tuition rates based on program. Given this existing authority, members requested amended proposal language to recommend that the Board of Regents raise tuition and set differential tuition by program.

Next, the committee discussed recommendation #6, which proposes that UW conduct exit interviews of students who do not complete their degrees or who transfer to an institution outside the UW System. The members discussed whether campuses are already attempting to collect this information and whether to put the requirement into statute, rather than making it voluntary. They also discussed recommending that K-12 schools collect data on why students decide not to attend higher education. The committee requested that this proposal be submitted to members as an additional proposed recommendation on a supplemental mail ballot following the meeting.

The committee then discussed proposed recommendation #7, which relates to enhanced UW System financial and program reporting to the Legislature. Members noted that UW already creates a significant number of reports, that employment and salary data are publicly available, and that the UW dashboard already includes data about student, faculty, and academic full-time equivalent (FTE).

The committee moved to discussion of proposed recommendation #8, relating to review of UW program offerings. Several members indicated a belief that the Board of Regents was already reviewing program offerings, and proposals for the Board or individual campuses to conduct reviews was unnecessary. Chair Nedweski clarified that a proposal to regionalize program offerings relates to duplication in a region, and not to ensuring that a particular program is only offered at one UW campus. Members also indicated that duplication between UW campuses and technical colleges is a greater issue than duplication between UW campuses.

Next, Rep. Joers commented regarding proposed recommendation #9, which relates to an active role in shared governance for faculty, staff, and students and his proposed bill draft. He indicated that an active role for faculty, staff, and students should be reincorporated into statute, rather than appearing in Board of Regents policy. Rep. Joers also indicated that he did not support creating a task force or commission to deliberate shared governance.

The committee then discussed proposed recommendation #10 for a blue ribbon commission on higher education in Wisconsin. Rep. Joers commented that the commission could address topics the study committee was unable to address.

Rep. Joers then explained proposed recommendation #11, which creates a student loan ombudsman and student borrow protections, and his proposed bill draft. He suggested that the committee forward a general recommendation that the Legislature pursue the idea, and only include the bill draft as an example of something the Legislature could introduce.

The committee then discussed proposed recommendation #12, relating to the distribution of GPR funding among campuses. Members discussed historic attempts to revise the system for distributing GPR to individual campuses, the possibility of per student FTE distributions, and the potential for the Joint Committee on Finance (JCF) to serve as the enforcement mechanism to ensure that regular review and revision of the formula occurs.

Next, members discussed proposed recommendation #13, relating to results-oriented incentives to improve educational outcomes and leverage efficiency efforts. Committee members noted that an

outcomes-based funding program already exists as one element of the GPR distribution formula, though it represents a small portion. They also discussed whether campuses needed more incentive to centralize services and to leverage shared purchasing power.

The committee then addressed proposed recommendation #14, which addresses various limitations on UW System administration funding and employment. Mr. Langdon encouraged moving towards a program revenue operation for UW System administration in which the administration bills campuses for the services it provides.

Members next discussed proposed recommendation #15, the creation of a streamlined bachelor's degree or college that offers only instruction and does not charge students for other services. Chair Nedweski commented that the idea could be tried as a pilot program, and other members noted that online programs already offer a more affordable and streamlined path for students.

The committee briefly discussed proposed recommendation #16, a proposal to merge UW-Madison and UW System administration.

The members then moved to proposed recommendation #17, which would create non-partisan staff positions to provide direct assistance to individual regents. Members discussed the current support and information received by the regents and whether additional staff is necessary.

Next, the committee discussed proposed recommendation #18, relating to credit transfer between the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System. Members noted that articulation agreements already exist, and the issue is whether credits fulfill specific degree requirements and not whether they are accepted as general education credits. Members noted that universal numbering may not address the problem of credit transferability.

The committee then took up proposed recommendation #19, which proposes to restrict UW position authority or to require JCF approval for positions and salaries. Members noted that limiting the creation of new positions that exceed 200 percent of the Wisconsin median income is an unreasonable restriction for technical positions, and discouraged JCF attempts to manage UW employment. Ms. Froelich requested that the supplemental mail ballot include a recommendation that pay for faculty and staff be raised to the median in the upcoming state budget.

At the conclusion, members asked that the final study committee report reflect that the committee's recommendations are for further exploration of a topic by the Legislature, and are not endorsements of the policy proposals themselves.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Nedweski concluded the meeting by thanking members for their service. The meeting adjourned at 2:41 p.m.

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