
Wisconsin Legislative Council

MINUTES



STUDY COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM

412 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI
July 11, 2024
1:00 p.m. - 3:40 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 Robert Atwell, Scott Beightol, Shauna Froelich, William Hsu, Peter Kies, Cecelia Klingele, James Langdon, Jerome Lippert, Betsy Morgan, Janice Mueller, Ananth Seshadri, S. Mark Tyler, and Robert Venable.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS
EXCUSED: Public Member Kurt Bauer.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Anne Sappenfield, Director; Katie Bender-Olson and Scott Grosz, Principal Attorneys; and Emily Hicks, Staff Attorney.

APPEARANCES: Patricia Brady, Former General Counsel of the University of Wisconsin System and author of *A History of the University of Wisconsin System* (University of Wisconsin Press).

OPENING REMARKS FROM ANNE SAPPENFIELD, DIRECTOR, LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL STAFF

Anne Sappenfield, Director of the Legislative Council staff, welcomed committee members, thanked them for their service, and introduced the Legislative Council staff assigned to the committee. She then presented a video featuring remarks from Wisconsin legislators regarding the work of interim study committees. In closing, Ms. Sappenfield briefly described the procedures followed throughout the study committee process.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ASSIGNMENT

Chair Nedweski introduced herself and welcomed the committee members. At her invitation, committee members introduced themselves and briefly explained their backgrounds and interest in the committee's topic.

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRIBUTED MATERIALS BY LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL COMMITTEE STAFF

Emily Hicks, Legislative Council Staff Attorney, briefly described the contents of the staff brief distributed to members prior to the meeting. She also informed members about the research and support services provided to the committee by the assigned Legislative Council staff.

PRESENTATION BY PATRICIA BRADY, AUTHOR OF *A HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM* (UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS)

The committee heard a presentation on the history of the University of Wisconsin (UW) System from Patricia Brady, former UW System legal counsel. Ms. Brady outlined the establishment of UW-Madison, the creation of state normal schools for technical studies and teacher training, UW-Madison being made a land grant university, and the creation of UW-Extension programs. She described the "Wisconsin Idea" - the sharing of information and knowledge from the UW for the benefit of all state citizens – and its importance to the development of the UW.

Ms. Brady also noted changes to the UW System in the 20th Century, including normal schools granting baccalaureate degrees, increased enrollment following World War II, creation of the Wisconsin State Universities from the normal schools, and establishment of two-year campuses. She also described events leading up to eventual passage of legislation to merge the UW schools and the Wisconsin State University system in 1971, which she described as largely motivated by a desire to achieve institutional efficiencies, reduce competition for resources between the systems, and eliminating duplicative services. Ms. Brady outlined more recent forces affecting the UW System, including sources and amount of funding, changes to UW-Extension administration, incorporation of two-year campuses into four-year institutions, and enactment of statutory provisions prescribing more extensive oversight of the UW System.

Committee members asked questions of Ms. Brady following the presentation. Questions addressed topics such as similarities between pre-merger conditions in the 1970's and conditions today, changes to state funding of the UW over time, and legislative and public support for changes to UW governance in the past.

DISCUSSION OF COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT

Chair Nedweski initiated committee discussion by describing the study committee's scope and the shared goals of the members to support the UW System going forward. She then asked committee members to describe their reasons for serving and the primary areas on which they want the committee to focus.

Members each articulated their interests and top issues facing the UW System. Committee members highlighted changes to higher education delivery and UW market share, future institution deficits and concerns over long-term viability of individual campuses, as well as demographic changes resulting in a

declining population of college-age students and participation in college. They also noted potential competition between technical and UW campuses for students and expressed concern about public perception of the UW System and negative discourse about it. Members commented on changes to state funding for the UW System and its impact on staffing and student tuition rates, the lack of UW bonding authority, dropping UW rankings and graduation rates, and the difference in situation between UW-Madison and other system campuses.

Additionally, the committee members expressed concern about the future of two-year UW campuses, the system's ability to adapt to consumer and employer expectations similar to efforts by the technical college system, and attracting students to Wisconsin and retaining UW graduates in the state. Members also mentioned the importance of the UW in providing graduates for a knowledge-based workforce and economy of the future. Finally, members raised the issue of governance structure of the Board of Regents and its exercise of statutory authority and legislative regulation of the UW System.

Chair Nedweski concluded the committee discussion by summarizing themes she heard expressed. These themes included: demographics and enrollment; system governance; public perception; consideration of the funding model and whether changes are needed; and transparency and accountability for the UW System.

PLANS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Chair Nedweski announced August 1 as the tentative date for the next study committee meeting, and proposed the UW System funding model as a topic of focus. She also provided the following potential dates for future meetings: August 29, September 26, and October 24.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

KBO:jal