Two UWO proposals among 12 selected to spur economic, workforce development statewide

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Two University of Wisconsin Oshkosh economic development initiatives answering the call to close critical skills gaps in the state workforce got the green light for new grant funding by the University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents' Research, Economic Development, and Innovation Committee (REDI) on Nov. 1.

The REDI committee supported UW Oshkosh-collaborative initiatives involving the ongoing development of three engineering technology degrees with UW-Green Bay and a broader, UW Systemwide effort to address the state nursing shortage. The two initiatives will benefit from approximately \$1.9 million and \$3.2 million, respectively.

"We appreciate the REDI Committee's support for these key UW Oshkosh-connected initiatives," UW Oshkosh Chancellor Richard Wells said. "These academic programs and degrees we are cooperatively developing and enhancing through the new 'Incentive Grants' are intentional, focused, skills-gap-closers that have been designed with regional business and workforce partners to meet our New North's and state's economic needs while delivering the highest-quality education to students."

Overall, the REDI committee's action on Nov. 1 gave UW System institutions approval to deploy \$22.5 million over the next two years to support increased economic growth and a stronger Wisconsin workforce.

"This represents the Wisconsin Idea at its best," said UW System President Kevin P. Reilly. "We are investing university resources to address key state priorities. These investments will help drive regional economic development and advance new educational and research initiatives to support traditional and emerging Wisconsin industries."

"We see this as an important strategy in more effectively aligning UW campus collaborations with economic and workforce development initiatives wherever they occur in the state," said Regent Tim Higgins, chair of the Board of Regents' Research, Economic Development, and Innovation Committee. "These efforts will provide direct benefit to businesses and communities statewide, and create new and expanded opportunities for our students and faculty."

Higgins cited funding across four UW campuses to address the nursing shortage as an example of how sustainable funding from a range of outside sources could be leveraged with a multiplier effect.

"In a time when the demographics of an aging Baby Boomer population place increasing demands on healthcare, this funding will help alleviate the nursing shortage in Wisconsin by addressing the

educational, workforce, and economic development needs in this critical area. It will also help position Wisconsin to be more competitive with other funding providers locally and nationally going forward," said Higgins.

Regent Emeritus Jeffrey Bartell led the committee that selected 12 grants for funding from a total of 56 entries from UW institutions statewide.

"Our panel of business, industry, and university experts recognized that grant recipients have tapped a deep reservoir of campus talent, innovative thinking, and collaboration with the private sector to provide new approaches to economic and workforce development," said Bartell.

Last month, the UW Board of Regents approved reallocating existing university funds for the Incentive Grant program, as required by the state's 2013-15 biennial budget. These one-time funds will be used in fiscal years 2014 and 2015 for innovative and sustainable economic development projects. Higgins expressed his appreciation to the Governor and legislative leaders for their cooperation in launching this series of projects.

Incentive Grant recipients (and award amounts) include:

UW-Eau Claire

• Responsible Mining Initiative: Building an Educated STEM Workforce for the Natural Resource Industry (\$451,317)

UW-Eau Claire, UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, and UW Oshkosh

• Addressing the Nursing Shortage: Statewide Initiative to Increase Nursing Program Faculty, Expand Student Enrollment, and Enhance Workforce Development (\$3,218,703)

UW-Extension

• Capital Catalyst Commercialization Seed Fund with WEDC Match (\$1 million)

UW-La Crosse

• Expansion of Statistical Consulting Center to Serve Business Needs (\$126,248)

UW-Madison

• Igniter—An Engine for Technology Commercialization (\$2.4 million)

UW-Milwaukee, UW-Parkside, UW-Whitewater

• Research and Training Center for Commercialization of Intensive Aquaculture & Aquaponics (\$2,452,500)

UW-Milwaukee, **UW-Parkside**

• SE Wisconsin Applied Chemistry Center of Excellence (\$2,998,800)

UW-Milwaukee, **UW-Whitewater**

• Water Technology Accelerator (\$3 million)

UW Oshkosh, UW-Green Bay

• Collaborative Engineering Technology Program (\$1,892,000)

UW-Stevens Point

- Collaborative Research Facility for Development and Commercialization of Biorefinery Technologies: Cellulose Pilot & Processing Lab (\$2,837,596)
- Economic Development Through Innovation in Specialty Papers, Packaging, and Converting (\$1,445,336)

UW-Stevens Point, UW-Extension

• Aquaculture Business Incubator and Aquaponic Innovation Center: Economic Development for Emerging Agricultural Industries (\$677,500)

Incentive Grant program judges included business, industry, and university representatives from across the state:

- Dean Amhaus, President & CEO of The Water Council, Milwaukee
- Kris Andrews, Assistant Vice President for Federal Relations, UW System, Madison
- Mark Bugher, Retired Director of the University Research Park, Madison
- Rob Cramer, Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, UW-Platteville
- Nick DeMarco, President & Founder of Practichem, Burlington
- David Eckmann, Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Economic Development, UW-Stevens Point
- Reed Hall, CEO and Secretary of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp., Madison
- Charlie Goff, Venture Capitalist and President of NEW Capital Management, Little Chute
- Mark Lange, Executive Director of the Division of Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, UW-Extension
- Alan Perlstein, Executive Director, Wisconsin Energy Research Consortium, Milwaukee
- Toni Sikes, Chair of the Wisconsin Technology Council and Co-founder of the Art Commission, Madison
- Tom Still, President of the Wisconsin Technology Council and its subsidiary, the Wisconsin Innovation Network, Madison
- Mark Tyler, President and founder of OEM Fabricators, Inc. & public member/past president of the Wisconsin Technical College System Board and UW System Regent Emeritus
- Julia Wallace, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, UW-Green Bay
- Shannon Zimmerman, Founder and CEO of Sajan, River Falls

UW System News contributed to this story.

Learn more:

 Regional academic, manufacturing leaders applaud Regents' approval of engineering technology degrees (July 2013)