MINUTES

University Staff Congress

9.21.26

All Members present with the following exceptions:

MEMBERS EXCUSED: B. Parker (1), P. Haney (8), M. Moen (10), K. Kobor (16), K. Radspinner (23), C. Morales (39), K. Eaton (44), J. Johnson (48), C. Merwin (51), K. Demick (59), S. Zywicki (83), K. Newton (81), P. Jochimsen (64), R. Kutz (73), D. Arbay (74), C. Carollo-Zeuner (75)

MEMBERS ABSENT: K. Rieselbach (31), D. Odenweller (29)

At 2:30 PM, Vice Chancellor Cramer called the meeting to order.

Vice Chancellor Cramer directed the attention of the Congress to the draft Minutes of the previous meeting. A motion to approve was heard, as was a second. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Vice Chancellor Cramer paused to accept public comments. None sought recognition in this regard.

Introducing his report, Vice Chancellor Cramer noted he would present a four-slide financial presentation previously shared with other governance groups, pausing for discussion after each slide rather than holding questions until the end.

Vice Chancellor informed the Congress of the 30 October retirement date of the Secretary. Vice Chancellor thanked the Secretary for his service to shared governance.

Vice Chancellor reported that Workday Software updates were completed over the weekend. He also referenced the annual breakfast event with Interim Chancellor Eric Wilcots. Interim Chancellor reported at the event that the university received over 75,000 freshman applications. Graduate School applications are also trending upward.

Reviewing the Fiscal Year 2027 budget breakdown (running July 1st through June 30th), Vice Chancellor noted that UW-Madison operates with approximately $5.2 billion in total revenue, representing about two-thirds of the entire Universities of Wisconsin system's financial activity. The state's 9% share represents approximately $500 million. Vice Chancellor noted that looking ahead, the university must remain attentive to fiscal pressures such as enrollment volatility risks and tuition policy uncertainties.

Representative of District 49 noted that while a $500 million state allocation is significant, it grants the state an outsized amount of authority over a $5.2 billion budget, such as preventing independent borrowing or dorm construction. Representative asked how the university can communicate this to the public without advocating for privatization.

Reply came from Vice Chancellor Cramer that the $500 million allocation carries substantial oversight because UW-Madison is legally structured as a state agency. This status provides major benefits, such as participation in the fully funded Wisconsin Retirement System, but creates an operational paradox.

Representative of District 49 noted that while the state's funding share dropped from roughly 45% historically to 9% today, restrictions have not loosened. Representative Fritter raised concerns regarding the proposed undergraduate tuition freeze, pointing out that the state only pays for two-thirds of employee wages with the remaining third traditionally funded by tuition, and questioned where funding for employee pay raises will come from under a freeze.

Reply came from Vice Chancellor Cramer that the Board of Regents' biennial proposal couples the undergraduate tuition freeze with a request for an increase in state support to fully fund employee pay plans for the next two fiscal years.

Representative of District 54 asked how much lower the university's General Purpose Revenue percentage could drop before it alters the state’s legal and regulatory influence over the institution. Reply came that because UW-Madison exists by virtue of state law, the state maintains full legal authority even if direct financial support dropped hypothetically to 0%.

Representative of District 54 asked for an explanation of auxiliary operations within the budget pie chart. Reply came that auxiliary operations encompass units that generate their own independent funding such as Housing, Dining, and Athletics.

Representative of District 68 expressed appreciation for the pie chart and detailed budget overview, noting that even as someone working in university finance, it is difficult to find big-picture breakdowns or year-over-year departmental allocation data. Representative asked where the general public can access more comprehensive materials detailing the Fiscal Year 2027 budget.

Reply came that the presentation slides will be distributed directly to the Congress via the Secretary. He also directed Congress members to the public Board of Regents meeting documents for campus budget details and confirmed that the budget model will remain a consistent topic of discussion. Representative of District 68 followed up that department-level funding comparisons for 2027 against past fiscal years would be highly helpful.

Representative of District 80 asked if comparative budget slides exist showing UW-Madison against other state-supported Big Ten institutions. Reply came that comparative reports exist across various external networks and stated that the university would track those reports down.

Vice Chancellor Cramer reviewed revenue and expenditure trends and explained that expenses and revenues have both shown steady growth over time, with the net difference tracking the university's margin. He noted that as a non-profit state agency, maintaining a positive operating margin is not for commercial profit, but is critical to provide capital that can be directly reinvested back into teaching, research, and service missions.

Vice Chancellor Cramer paused for questions.

Representative of District 49 raised a concern regarding how the university's financial margin is being generated, stating that his constituents frequently report being instructed to take on extra workloads across different departments and asked the administration can be done to relieve this workload strain.

Reply came that during the prior fiscal year, the administration intentionally held positions vacant due to uncertainties regarding federal policies and potential drops in international student enrollment. He noted that the administration has authorized additional positions within Fiscal Year 2027 budget.

Representative of District 54 asked if the revenue-generating nature of auxiliary operations runs in direct conflict with the university’s legal status as a non-profit entity. Reply came that auxiliary operations do not conflict with the non-profit mission. Vice Chancellor noted that the university avoids charging maximum market-rate fees because there is no profit motive, aiming only for an adequate margin to ensure operational success.

Representative of District 54 asked what caused the revenue spike for Fiscal Year 2022 and why the university has projected a relative decline since then. Reply came that the Fiscal Year 2022 high was a peak driven by a surge in freshman enrollment where roughly 500 additional students arrived on campus.

Vice Chancellor Cramer talked about tracking monthly federal research awards according to the federal fiscal year. Vice Chancellor Cramer utilized a bathtub analogy to explain the flow of federal research dollars. He reviewed the administrative operations lifecycle and highlighted the "Operating Model Prototype" currently entering design review, which collaborates with different UW Schools. Vice Chancellor paused for questions.

Representative of District 49 raised concerns regarding future federal funding issues, highlighting political discussions regarding a potential presidential takeover or restructuring of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that could severely impact biomedical research, as well as public

scrutiny facing the "AI for Enterprise" initiative. Reply came that these are critical items to monitor.

Representative of District 49 also requested an explanation regarding the new budget model. Reply came that 40% of tuition revenues and federal indirect costs go to individual schools and colleges, while the remaining 60% is retained by central campus.

Representative of District 3 expressed a concern regarding the current administrative management of graduate student HR and payroll funding under the new systems, reporting multiple instances within their college where graduate students went unpaid or received only half of their scheduled pay. Reply came thanking the Representative for flagging the issue and promising to look into it.

Vice Chancellor Cramer recognized Cindy Torstveit, Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning & Management (FP&M), for the purpose of providing a report.

Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit provided an operational overview of the FP&M division. She reported that the division's organizational structure comprises more than 1,000 personnel, making FP&M the university's largest non-academic unit. She detailed that the department employs over 1,200 trades, service, support, and office staff, a significant portion of whom are represented by the University Staff Congress.

Associate Vice Chancellor Cindy Torstveit addressed questions submitted in advance by Congress members.

Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit reported that custodial recruitment remained active over the summer and would continue into the fall. She noted a recent batch of 15 successful custodial hires came on board.

Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit noted that internal FP&M custodial staff will continue to maintain the absolute first right of refusal of any overtime opportunities before any external support options are considered.

Regarding custodial and English Language Learner (ELL) opportunities, Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit provided an update on employment access initiatives, reminding the Congress that the university recently eliminated the English proficiency requirement for all custodial positions.

Regarding work scheduling and maintenance response times, Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit thanked university staff members for acting as the "eyes and ears" of campus by diligently reporting structural and operational issues.

Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit detailed the specific five-tier priority framework utilized by FP&M work schedulers to manage campus service requests.

Representative of District 54 requested clarification regarding the university's building security policy, specifically asking whether building lockups and general security are handled by the campus police (UWPD) or if they fall under custodial responsibilities. Reply came that campus police are in charge of the building security.

Representative of District 54 sought a specific follow-up regarding which entity is physically responsible for unlocking campus buildings, noting that significant confusion exists within their building when a designated staff member misses a shift. Reply came that she would verify with her team.

Representative of District 54 requested clarification regarding how FP&M determines whether a building project is classified as standard campus maintenance or if it must be funded directly by the individual department. Reply came that every physical space on campus is assigned a specific operational code—such as research, education, or office space. These classifications dictate the specific funding sources.

Representative of District 41 informed Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit that the second shift is also experiencing severe understaffing. Additionally, the workforce is aging, with many employees nearing retirement and experiencing an increasing number of accidents and injuries.

Representative of District 41 also expressed confusion regarding the university's spending priorities, that they have listened to constant conversations about employees not making enough money, yet campus construction has never stopped. They questioned why the university consistently identifies funds for new construction but never seems to have enough money to invest in its workers.

Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit noted that an Employee Recognition event for the second and third shifts was scheduled for that evening, which would provide an immediate opportunity to speak face-to-face with late-shift staff. She acknowledged the frustration but stated that newly authorized budget specifically allocated funding this year to add more staff.

Representative of District 80 reported a safety incident from mid-August involving a student worker who received a mild electrical shock while plugging a departmental laptop into a power strip. The representative expressed concern that the response from FP&M was slow and lacked thoroughness. Reply came that it would be investigated.

Representative of District 21 requested an update regarding the recent chilled water system interruption on campus, specifically asking whether the emergency expenses and the cost of the campus chillers were paid out of FP&M's operational budget. Reply came that the funding for the temporary chillers did not come out of FP&M's operational budget.

Representative of District 47 raised concerns regarding a substantial increase in the hourly charge-out rate for campus painters. Representative also questioned staffing delays across all trades. Reply came that FP&M is legally mandated to review its operational rates annually. She stated that she works closely with Physical Plant Director Paula Veltum and her leadership team to review vacancies across the board.

Representative of District 45 expanded on the charge-out rate discussion by highlighting unnecessary steps that lengthen remodeling project timelines. Reply came by acknowledging the concern and stating that the administration will review the process.

Representative of District 49 stated that custodial hiring should be managed on a continuous recruitment basis to keep up with the turnover. He also expressed skepticism regarding plans shared at the Board of Regents meeting to convert the demolished Extension Building site into green space. Regarding public transit, Representative talked about news reports indicating the mayor intends to cut early morning, late evening, and weekend bus lines to campus. Finally, he requested that HR staff conduct night-shift site visits at least once a month.

Reply came clarifying the Extension Building site that the campus's biennial capital budget request includes a project to decant and demolish the Humanities Building and relocate its occupants. Music program is one of the occupants. The long-term plan for the Extension Building site, which sits directly adjacent to Hamel Music Center, is to construct an official addition onto Hamel Music Center. Associate Vice Chancellor Torstveit promised to follow up with Transportation Services and report back to the body. She noted she would coordinate with HR leadership to establish scheduled night-shift outreach.

Vice Chancellor Cramer recognized Mr. Terry Fritter, Chair of the Central Committee.

Mr. Fritter encouraged the Congress to get involved in the upcoming recruitment and hiring process to fill the vacancy of the Secretary. Chair Fritter extended his gratitude to Julie Anderson for serving as the university staff representative on the Chancellor Search and Screen Committee. Chair Fritter announced several committee vacancies.

Chair Fritter announced the deadline to submit nominations for the Pringle Award.

Representative of District 80 asked if members can attend other committees to listen and observe or if they have to get permission first from the committee. Reply came that committees are all open to the public under open meetings laws.

Representative of District 21 noted that a significant number of districts currently are lacking elected representatives and inquired whether the Central Committee has a formal outreach plan to actively recruit members and fill those vacancies. Reply came that outreach attempts were

made in the past, but they were not successful and that representation fluctuates as new members join while others drop off.

At 4PM, Vice Chancellor Cramer entertained a motion to adjourn. A motion was heard as was a second. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Minutes prepared and submitted by: E. Sidorenko / Assistant to the Secretary