Statement of the UVM Distinguished Professors to the CCOET, Chancellor Mone, and UWS about Research and the Budget Cuts

We Distinguished Professors come to you as members of a remarkably strong faculty that has taken root at UWM despite the historical lack of state support. As a group, we are officially charged with actively promoting and encouraging the research and creative activities of all UW Milwaukee faculty, which is what provides students at all levels with cutting-edge course work, and also charged with promoting undergraduate and graduate student recruitment. Budget cuts coupled with tuition freezes over the last several years have already made both research and recruitment difficult. UWM lags far behind its peers in support for research, faculty and staff salaries, and stipends for graduate students, which means that it loses faculty, staff, and students to universities in other states where support for public education remains stronger. Thus many of the best and brightest, who could help Wisconsin prosper in the knowledge economy of the present and future, either leave or never come to Wisconsin in the first place. The latest round of budget cuts makes this situation even worse, and they hit UWM just as it is trying to build research infrastructure in many areas of immediate concern to the state and its citizens.

UWM serves as a key intellectual and creative force for our state and community, providing an irreplaceable resource for the social, economic, environmental, and cultural prosperity of Milwaukee and the surrounding area. Its faculty, students, staff, and alumni address and solve problems and issues with local to global dimensions, and we graduate more Wisconsin residents than any other campus in the state. The Distinguished Professors Committee of UWM has thus endorsed unanimously the following statement of principles and recommendations to guide the budget allocation process of 2016 and beyond, and allow UWM to retain its key role.

Principles

In this time of severe budget compression, it is paramount that the preservation, sustenance, and elevation of UWM’s academic core be the central goal of the budget and related strategic planning. Only through a vibrant academic program can the campus Strategic Vision be fulfilled: “We will be a top-tier research university that is the best place to learn and work for students, faculty and staff, and that is a leading driver for sustainable prosperity.” As faculty at UWM who have spent our careers advancing knowledge, and who have brought millions of dollars in grants and contracts into the state to support the university and its students, we know that research and creative activity is what drives the whole academic enterprise, as seen in the figure below:
Although they are more difficult to quantify than student tuition dollars, research and creative activity provide the dynamic foundation and structure for excellent student learning experiences at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and are thus the ultimate source of those tuition dollars. Working with their teachers and mentors at the frontiers of knowledge, UWM students become well prepared for the 21st century knowledge-based society. Moreover, research infuses community engagement with expertise, allowing a broad range of community and business concerns to be addressed through powerful partnerships. Local, regional, institutional and private support grow as residents, organizations, and businesses understand that UWM is a powerful research university critical for their future that educates students for excellence.

The only way to continue these benefits is to retain and strengthen the superb faculty and staff who make research and creative activity and the education of students possible. This will also provide the only way to meet the Strategic Initiatives in the draft Strategic Plan, including: the development of a top-tier research environment that promotes growing research impact; the creation of a “Milwaukee Experience” to make UWM a destination campus that engages students and supports their development; the improvement of pathways for partnerships/collaborations with the local community and businesses; the delivery of relevant, innovative, engaging and distinctive academic programs; strengthening and expanding UWM’s support within the region and across the state.

**Recommendations**

1. We urge the CCOET to develop its budget recommendations, and Chancellor Mone and UW-System to make decisions about the budget, based on the understanding that UWM is a research university and that all we do as an academic institution flows from that identity and its
expression in the sciences, humanities, arts, and professions. Concretely, this means sparing the academic core of the university from budget cuts in order to preserve UWM’s future, as cuts in the core would lead to an impoverished research base from which to pursue innovation and progress. Thus, all cuts must come from units that do not directly handle the core academic teaching and research mission, or through administrative reorganization that will shrink the budget, and may, in fact, enhance possibilities for research by allowing faculty and graduate students to work across what are now artificial boundaries rather than be stymied by them.

2. We urge the CCOET, Chancellor Mone, and UWS to strengthen UWM as a research university by raising the stipends of graduate teaching assistants to the national averages of their respective fields so that we can attract uniformly high quality graduate students in sufficient numbers to sustain and grow UWM as a research university. This is our first priority for budget enhancements.

Competitive stipends will solve several problems:

- They would provide the quality and numbers of graduate students needed to restore and then develop our graduate programs. Right now we are in a death spiral because programs cannot compete for such students, and we have a much-reduced ability to recruit bright minds to bolster Wisconsin’s economy and pursue innovation and progress.
- High quality graduate students will encourage top-flight faculty to stay and commit to UWM, as well as to consider coming to UWM in the first place.
- An improvement in graduate student quality will lead to increased extramural funding and academic recognition for UWM.
- High quality TAs mean enhanced undergraduate teaching and research, in which TAs commonly provide some supervision. The outcome will stimulate our primary aim to provide excellent education for all of our students.
- As both the research excellence and quality of our graduating undergraduate and graduate students climb, UWM will secure its key aim to be recognized by students/parents and the public as a destination campus. This realization will stabilize student numbers, an absolutely critical outcome, and stimulate donations from institutions and private donors.

Providing an increase in graduate assistant stipends is essential to maintaining our position as a research university rather than a comprehensive. Limiting a research mission to one public university, and that not in the state’s major metropolitan area, will place Wisconsin in the lowest tier of states, disastrous in today's knowledge economy.