

Science and Technology Innovation Center project at UW-River Falls gains UW System board approval

August 24, 2018 – The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents voted Thursday to include the new Science and Technology Innovation Center at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in the approved 2019-21 biennial budget request. Regents included the request of \$110.9 million in enumerated funding for the new building in the capital budget request that will be considered by state legislature and the governor.

The Science and Technology Innovation Center will be designed to support modern science education at UW-River Falls and meet industry demands in STEM fields. In addition to increasing undergraduate research opportunities, the facility will play a vital role in supporting economic growth in Western Wisconsin by fostering collaboration between faculty, students and regional businesses.

“I am grateful for the strong support of the UW System Board of Regents for funding of the proposed UW-River Falls Science and Technology Innovation Center as part of the capital project budget approved by the board on Thursday,” said UW-River Falls Chancellor Dean Van Galen. “This innovative facility is needed not only to replace aging and outdated facilities, but also to support the university’s significant growth in the sciences and related areas. Last year, 32% of undergraduate degrees awarded at UWRF were in STEM fields—among the highest rates in the UW System, and 10% above the national average.”

Plans for the new facility at UW-River Falls have been in the works for some time, with the building already having been on the UW System project priority list and a privately funded feasibility study having been completed last year. If funded, planning would take place in the 2019-21 biennium, with construction slated for 2021-23.

The project will relocate science departments from the outdated Centennial Science Hall which was dedicated in 1979 and from the Agricultural Science building which dates back to 1966. Biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology/neuroscience will all be housed in the new space, which will feature 12 flexible undergraduate instructional lab suites and active learning studios and will contain 32 undergraduate research spaces totaling 22,240 square feet of space designed to meet the needs of modern teaching and

interactive learning. The new facility will also allow UW-River Falls to better accommodate demand in high growth fields like animal science and provide more support for new, popular programs like agricultural engineering and neuroscience.

The Science and Technology Innovation Center will also be home to a strategic UW-River Falls/Business Collaboration Innovation Space intended to support internships and incubation of joint university-business projects. Plans for the innovation space include three wet bench research labs, a prototyping space/makerspace/fabrication lab, a collaboration area, conference room and offices to be used by local businesses who will be able to better access and leverage UW-River Falls faculty and student talent while also providing unique hands-on learning experiences for the students themselves.

Requested funding will also allow for a fire suppression system and safe chemical storage areas, as well as demolition of the nearly obsolete Hagestad Hall, currently rated by UW System administration as being in a physical and functional condition that is simply too poor to usefully renovate.

The facility will have a major impact on the entire UW-River Falls campus and will serve students from a wide range of majors. Each year, 1,700 students take laboratory science courses that would be housed in the Science and Technology Innovation Center and nearly 60 percent of UWRF students take at least one lab course during their academic career.

“The Science and Technology Innovation Center will positively impact a wide range of students across all disciplines on campus as a part of our well-rounded liberal arts education,” said Dean of the UW-River Falls College of Arts and Sciences Dean Yohnk. “It will also support our outstanding faculty in providing students with high-impact learning experiences including collaborative student-faculty research and will enable the university to further grow its partnerships with regional business and industry.”

Interest in STEM/health fields is on the rise at UW-River Falls. UWRF saw a 40% growth in new freshmen enrollment in STEM/health majors between 2013 and 2016 and 31.6% percent of bachelor’s degrees were awarded in STEM fields in 2015-16, well above the national average of 21%. An 8% growth in Wisconsin STEM jobs is projected over the next 10 years.

The Board of Regents approval includes enumeration for planning in the 2019-21 biennial budget request and advanced enumeration for construction in 2021-23. The budget now heads to the state legislature for approval.

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