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UW System Board of Regents approves Blugold Commitment

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EAU CLAIRE — The UW System Board of Regents voted today to support the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire's Blugold Commitment, an initiative that will allow the university to maintain and enhance the high-impact learning experiences students say they value.

After a lengthy discussion, the Board of Regents approved the Blugold Commitment on a 14-2 vote, with a requirement that UW-Eau Claire bring a more detailed plan back in May describing how funds raised from the initiative will be used. The Blugold Commitment will be funded by increasing the amount of differential tuition paid by UW-Eau Claire students.

During its meeting Thursday, the regents' Business, Finance, and Audit Committee unanimously recommended to the board approval of the Blugold Commitment.

With the Blugold Commitment, differential tuition — a separate tuition above the tuition set annually by the Board of Regents — will total \$1,200 per year, phased in over four years. To assure that UW-Eau Claire continues to maintain access for low- and middle-income families, up to 40 percent of the tuition increase will be used to provide grants for students with need.

"I believe that approval of the Blugold Commitment is best for students today and in the future," said Regent Michael Spector, vice president of the Board of Regents. "We have to think about all of them."

Even when the Blugold Commitment is fully implemented, UW-Eau Claire's tuition and fees still will be nearly equal to those at UW-La Crosse and UW-Stout and well below tuition at UW-Madison and at the University of Minnesota, a fact that was noted by several regents who supported the initiative.

"The Blugold Commitment will allow us to preserve and enhance the kinds of experiences that make up the distinctive UW-Eau Claire experience," Chancellor Brian Levin-Stankevich said, noting that the initiative will enable the university to hire up to 50 new faculty and staff members. "These high-impact programs — things like global immersion experiences,

collaborative research and internships — help our students succeed in college and help prepare them to make significant contributions to our region and state after they graduate."

Hiring up to 50 new faculty and staff members will help to reduce a rapidly rising student- to-faculty ratio, a key factor in student retention and graduation, Levin-Stankevich said. The additional faculty also will enable the university to maintain high-quality learning experiences for all students, he said.

"Hiring additional faculty will significantly improve the availability of courses needed for graduation and give more faculty the time to devote to continuous improvement of student learning experiences at UW-Eau Claire," Levin-Stankevich said.

While the Blugold Commitment asks students to invest in the faculty and staff needed to make intensive educational experiences such as internships, international or cross-cultural experiences and primary research opportunities available to all students , it also asks faculty and staff to commit to providing an integrated curriculum and more experiential learning, Levin-Stankevich said. As importantly, it asks alumni and friends to commit to raising more scholarship funds, he said.

During Friday's discussion, regents praised the many UW-Eau Claire students who both supported and opposed the Blugold Commitment. Several students spoke during Thursday's committee meeting and others contacted regents directly.

While there is not a consensus among UW-Eau Claire students regarding the Blugold Commitment, several regents said they believed students have been very involved in developing the proposal and have had opportunities to provide input. Regents said they hope that requiring the university to return in May with a more detailed plan for spending Blugold Commitment monies will ease many student concerns. The regents also expressed hope that with the Blugold Commitment approved, the campus community will now come together to work out the plan's details.

Regent Aaron Wingad, a UW-Eau Claire student who is the student representative on the Board of Regents, said he was impressed by how closely UW-Eau Claire administrators worked with student leaders in developing the proposal. Students were treated as partners in the process in a way that he has never seen before, he said, adding that he also was impressed by the leadership shown by the Student Senate while working on a complex project.

Kevin Reilly, president of the UW System, told regents he forwarded the Blugold Commitment to the board because he was confident that students had been involved in developing the proposal. He also said financial aid, faculty and staff support of the Blugold Commitment, and the student government's support were critical to his decision to recommend it for board approval.

Levin-Stankevich announced the Blugold Commitment in August 2009. In the months since, he and other campus leaders have worked closely with elected students and sought input from all students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni and other friends of the university.

Student leaders were involved in developing all aspects of the Blugold Commitment, Levin-Stankevich told the regents. During Thursday's committee meeting several student leaders voiced their support for the Blugold Commitment, and several students who opposed the proposal also offered comments.

Student supporters said that given current state budget constraints, the Blugold Commitment is the best way to provide high-impact programs to all current and future students. Students who opposed the proposal said they were concerned that there were not enough details about how funds would be spent. Regents said the amendment requiring the university to provide more details this spring addresses those concerns.

Two UW-Eau Claire alumni also spoke Thursday in support of the proposal, noting the lifelong value of having a degree from a highly respected institution like UW-Eau Claire. The Blugold Commitment will allow the university to continue its tradition of excellence while remaining affordable, they said. They also talked about the strong support for the proposal from the Alumni Association and UW-Eau Claire Foundation boards of directors.

Details about the Blugold Commitment can be found on the [Blugold Commitment Web site](#).

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