

UW-Madison: UW professor confirmed as assistant commerce secretary

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MADISON — Michael C. Morgan, a University of Wisconsin–Madison professor in the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, was confirmed on July 14 by the U.S. Senate as assistant secretary of commerce for environmental observation and prediction. In that capacity, he will serve as deputy administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

According to NOAA, Morgan will be responsible for providing agency-wide direction regarding weather, water, climate and ocean observations, including in situ instruments and satellites, and the process of converting observations to predictions for environmental threats.

“I am honored to have been confirmed by the Senate and thrilled to be able to further advance our nation’s capabilities in earth system prediction to allow for timely preparation for environmental threats,” says Morgan. “I have always embraced the Wisconsin Idea, which stipulates that knowledge be widely shared to make life better for all.”

To fulfill his new duties, Morgan will take a leave of absence from his role as a professor and associate chair of the department’s undergraduate program.

“Dr. Morgan will be an invaluable addition to the department and to our NOAA leadership team,” U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina M. Raimondo said in a recent news release from NOAA. “His decades of world-renowned atmospheric and oceanic scientific expertise and dedicated service to the community make him ideally qualified to help guide NOAA’s lifesaving observation and prediction activities.”

Morgan's research at UW-Madison has focused on the analysis, diagnosis, prediction and predictability of mid-latitude and tropical weather systems. He says his 27 years at the university (including a previous leave as a division director for the National Science Foundation) have offered him incomparable opportunities to think outside the boundaries of the institution.

"I am eager to build upon the knowledge I've acquired through my research with students and colleagues over the last several years, and to draw on the insights I've gained from my university, national and international service," Morgan says. "While my responsibilities at NOAA will be far broader, I see a synergy across my work at UW-Madison and my interest in the impact of weather systems on people and their communities."

Ankur Desai, professor and chair of Morgan's department in the UW-Madison College of Letters & Science, says Morgan is "a leading researcher in predictability of weather systems." These systems, he notes, are "critical for our ability to prepare in advance for potential disasters and protect lives and property here in Wisconsin and across the nation."

Morgan's expertise "translates directly to his new role supporting agencies such as NOAA," Desai says, adding that Morgan "is highly respected on campus, nationally, and throughout the U.S. science policy community. We will miss him in AOS but are proud to see him serve our nation."

The National Weather Service, located within NOAA, is home to many Badger alumni from the atmospheric and oceanic sciences department, Desai says.

Morgan has enjoyed a career filled with service. In addition to his work at UW-Madison and at NSF, he has also served as:

- An American Meteorological Society/University Corporation for Atmospheric Research Congressional Science Fellow working on energy and environmental issues in the office of U.S. Sen. Benjamin Cardin.

- Director for the Division of Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences at the National Science Foundation from June 2010 until June 2014.

- A member of the Board on Women and Minorities for the American Meteorological Society and of the Scientific and Technological Activities Commission for

Atmospheric and Oceanic Fluid Dynamics, as well as AMS Councilor.

-A member of the board of directors of the American Institute of Physics.

-A member of the World Meteorological Organization World Weather Research Program's Science Steering Committee since 2014.

Morgan was elected an AMS Fellow in 2018 and is completing a second term on the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research Board of Trustees.

"Michael's work on the predictability of weather systems itself is a shining example of the importance of fundamental research and the embodiment of the Wisconsin Idea," says Eric Wilcots, dean of the UW-Madison College of Letters & Science.

"Michael has been a steady and respected voice in support of science and our responsibilities as scientists to advance society. I am thrilled to see him appointed and confirmed to this incredibly important role as assistant secretary of commerce."