

Universities of Wisconsin: Dr. Eric Wilcots named as interim chancellor of UW-Madison

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MADISON, Wis.—Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman has named Dr. Eric Wilcots as interim chancellor of UW-Madison effective May 17.

Wilcots, currently Dean of the College of Letters & Science, the university's largest college, will succeed Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin when she departs to become President of Columbia University.

“Dean Wilcots is an energetic leader who will continue the positive momentum at our flagship while we search for a permanent successor to Chancellor Mnookin,” Rothman said. “He is extraordinarily well respected across the campus and has a deep knowledge of the university. He is the right person to continue to carry UW-Madison forward.”

Wilcots was named L & S dean in May 2020 and served in the interim role for several months before his permanent appointment. Prior to assuming the role of dean, he served as deputy dean of the college and associate dean for research, as well as associate dean for natural sciences. He has been part of the UW-Madison campus since 1995, when he started as a lecturer in the Department of Astronomy before joining the faculty a year later. Dean Wilcots has won two university teaching awards and is co-chair of the Wisconsin Science Festival steering committee. In 2023, he also served as interim provost for UW-Madison.

Prior to joining the university, he was a Karl Jansky Postdoctoral Fellow at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Socorro, New Mexico. He continues that

line of research through leading UW-Madison's involvement in the South African Large Telescope (SALT) project, the largest single-aperture telescope in the southern hemisphere.

Dean Wilcots earned his undergraduate degree in astrophysical sciences from Princeton University and his Ph.D. in astronomy from the University of Washington. Having received his first telescope in his youth, his research has focused on the evolution of galaxies across time. Dean Wilcots once served as director of the long-running University in the Park, a series of free public astronomy events at Wisconsin's state parks.

"The Board of Regents is pleased that Dr. Eric Wilcots is willing to step into the role of interim chancellor of UW-Madison," said Regent President Amy B. Bogost. "Dean Wilcots is eminently qualified to lead our premier research university. He has served the university for over 30 years and has a unique blend of experience in research, playing a major role in implementing the RISE initiative as well as being a fierce advocate for our liberal arts. Dean Wilcots will no doubt continue to build on the success of Chancellor Mnookin and her leadership team's current initiatives and protect and continue to strengthen our state's flagship institution."

"I am delighted by President Rothman's selection of Eric Wilcots as interim chancellor. For the past six years, Eric has proven himself to be an effective, impressive and collaborative dean of the College of Letters & Science, the largest college at UW-Madison, and he has evinced deep commitment to excellence in research and a life-changing student experience," said Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin. "In addition, there are few leaders on our campus with as much passion and commitment to the Wisconsin Idea and the ongoing success of our state's flagship."

"I am both humbled and honored to be asked to serve in this leadership role at such a consequential time in UW-Madison's history," said Wilcots.

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