UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PLATTEVILLE
Opportunity from the start

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UW-Platteville to build largest state-owned solar array

PLATTEVILLE, Wis. — The University of Wisconsin-Platteville received state approval Thursday to construct a 2.4 megawatt solar array in Memorial Park. This will be the largest solar array owned by a Wisconsin state agency and will make the university the sixth-highest on-site producer of renewable energy among higher education institutions in the nation, setting UW-Platteville apart as a leader in its commitment to renewable energy.

“We are excited to take this momentous step in our commitment to sustainability,” said Chancellor Dennis J. Shields. “These efforts will save taxpayer money and have a lasting impact on future generations of Pioneers. I am proud that UW-Platteville can serve as a model of innovation and pave the way for other state agencies to follow suit.”

Scheduled to be operational by fall 2021, the array will feed directly into the main electricity meter connected to the 32 campus buildings, generating all electricity in real-time, rather than sending back to the grid. It is anticipated to offset electricity by 17%, saving an annual $217,000 and reducing carbon emissions by 2,300 tons per year.

Plans for the solar array stemmed from a 2018 petition, signed by more than 300 UW-Platteville students, asking the university to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2030. In a May 2019 student referendum, more than 82% of UW-Platteville students agreed with moving toward this goal. This array is one of several projects the university is advancing in response to this student demand.

A project team explored several locations for the array, before deciding on five acres of south-facing hill just west of Pickard Hall. Rooftops and parking-lot awnings were ruled out due to cost and other ground mount locations required significant tree removal. A chain-link fence will surround the array, which will be installed with pilings. The array is expected to have a 30-year life, and is designed to accommodate future battery storage.

In addition to energy savings, the solar array is poised to bring additional hands-on learning opportunities across the university. Faculty have already incorporated projects into their coursework. Students in a sustainable and renewable energy systems course helped design the initial project; dairy science students formed a plan for sheep grazing under the array; and reclamation, environment and conservation students developed a native pollinator seeding plan for the space.

UW-Platteville offers a four-year renewable energy degree that is one of only a handful of its type in the nation and recently launched a new environmental science and conservation degree. For more information about UW-Platteville's sustainability planning, including the solar array, visit www.uwplatt.edu/department/sustainability.

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