



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

News Release

## 2021 Regent Scholar Awards: UW System recognizes three professors for distinction in research, innovation, entrepreneurship

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MADISON, Wis.—The University of Wisconsin System today announced three recipients of the 2021 Regent Scholar Awards. They will be honored at the next Board of Regents meeting April 8 via videoconference. The awards recognize UW System faculty for their extraordinary efforts in support of undergraduate research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

“This annual program provides prestigious, one-time grants to individual faculty and campus programs that undertake undergraduate research projects having the potential to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and talent development,” said UW System President Tommy Thompson.

The program, which was introduced in 2014, is designed to stimulate faculty-student collaborative research.

“These individuals represent the best and brightest among the extensive and broad range of talented faculty across UW System. We appreciate the conscientious and tireless work of faculty and staff innovators whose ideas may be recognized with Regent Scholar awards in future years,” said Regent Robert Atwell, chair of the Board’s Research, Economic Development, and Innovation (REDI) Committee, which administers the Regent Scholar grants.

The 2021 UW System Regent Scholar grant recipients are:

- **Dr. Ava Udvardia, Associate Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Biological Sciences, UW-Milwaukee**

*Enhancers for next-generation gene therapy vectors to treat optic neuropathies*

Project description: Damaged optic nerves resulting from glaucoma and other optic neuropathies do not spontaneously regenerate, leading to permanent loss of visual function. One reason is that nerve cells in the mature central nervous system (CNS) are unable to genetically reprogram to grow and re-establish the broken neural circuitry. This project will work to validate novel regeneration-specific gene promoters and enhancers for use in next-generation gene therapy vectors to promote CNS nerve regeneration.

Award Winner Video: <https://youtu.be/fTuGu6jbhq0>

- **Dr. Haijian Sun, Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, UW-Whitewater**

*A multimodal deep sensor fusion system for reliable and faster next-gen wireless vehicle communications*

Project description: Connected and automated vehicles (self-driving CAVs) have become a transformative technology that can change daily life. This project proposes to integrate inputs from multi-sensor methods, such as LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), cameras, ultrasonic technology, etc., to facilitate improved vehicle communications to better connect other cars or roadside units.

Award Winner Video: [https://youtu.be/wbi-p2\\_AByc](https://youtu.be/wbi-p2_AByc)

- **Dr. Francis Mann, Associate Professor and Co-Chair, Department of Chemistry, UW-Parkside**  
*Characterization of a novel bactericidal compound*

Project description: Novel antibiotic scaffolds are one of medicine's greatest needs as bacteria continue their race to evolve antibiotic resistance. The proposed research aims to generate industrial quantities of a unique compound for a comprehensive assessment of its potential as a lead molecule for further antibiotic development.

Award Winner Video: <https://youtu.be/enR92SyUBy4>

Eligibility for the award is open to all UW System university faculty with goals of:

- Providing summer funding for faculty to engage in research and other scholarly activities;
- Promoting stellar research and internship experiences for students, thus preparing a high-quality workforce;
- Stimulating innovation across all UW System campuses, ultimately driving regional economic development; and
- Recognizing superior and undergraduate research in the STEM disciplines and creative arts field at the Board of Regents level.

These grants are awarded competitively based on recommendations by a selection committee (chaired by Regent Kyle Weatherly) that included:

- **Jon Bartz**, Regional Director, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- **Dr. Tracy Davidson**, Director, STEM and Applied Research Initiatives, UW System
- **Peter Dulcamara**, Chief Scientist & Technical Vice President, Kimberly Clark Corporation
- **Dr. Preeta Gupta**, Manager, External Innovation, Promega Corporation
- **Dr. Erin L. Henry**, Senior Director, Venture Platform, Northwestern Mutual
- **Cory Mason**, Retired Business Consultant and Former Chief Information Officer for Twin Disc, Inc., and previously head of Global IT Architecture for SC Johnson.

Arjun Sanga, President of WiSys, along with Jennifer Souter, Director of Patents and Licensing for WiSys, managed the Regent Scholar program again this year. WiSys is an independent, nonprofit supporting organization for the UW System that advances scientific research throughout the state by patenting technologies developed out of the universities and licensing these inventions to companies capable of developing them to benefit Wisconsin and beyond.

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*The University of Wisconsin System serves approximately 165,000 students. Awarding nearly 37,000 degrees annually, the UW System is Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90 percent of in-state UW System graduates stay in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. The UW System provides a 23:1 return on state investment. UW System institutions also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy.*

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