

Wisconsin Space Grant Consortium  
2021 Summer/Fall Advisory Council Meeting  
Director's Report  
August 13, 2021

HQ Update: Space Grant Consortia are in the second year of our four-year grant cycle. With the new administration, the presidential budget proposal now includes non-zero funding for NASA's Office of STEM Engagement. The expiration of discretionary federal spending limits coupled with strong congressional support for the Space Grant program provide a rosy outlook on short-term funding. In the past year, we have responded to three augmentation opportunities and are preparing to respond to a fourth funding opportunity that should open for us in August of 2021, putting years 3-4 of our current grant cycle at an annual level of \$900,000. Additional augmentations that bring the annual state funding to \$1M are also possible in the coming months if Congress can pass the Appropriations Bill for FY22 that funds NASA. This seems increasingly likely.

Growth in funding is, of course, a good thing, but only if our existing programs can scale easily to higher participation rates. Challenges in the coming year will include retaining the breadth of our program opportunities while increasing participation rates. Increased reporting requirements and the enhanced scrutiny attendant to large federal grants will continue to strain our small office. We will spend much of the coming fall figuring out how to address these challenges. Stay tuned – Good problems to solve and the input of the Advisory Council will be essential in the coming year.

The coming year or possibly following year will also bring an on-site audit of the WSGC program by NASA Headquarters staff. Reports from Lead Institutions that have been through this process suggest that early planning and document preparation is essential. The audit is not purely financial as might be anticipated but extends broadly to assess the operation of the Consortium as a whole. The full participation of the Advisory Council will be critical. Ours is not yet scheduled, but we will likely hear in the coming months whether we can expect an on-site audit this year.

Base-Program Updates: Thank you to everyone who helped us close out the one-year extension of our previous grant. It was a burden and a challenge to wrap up your institutions' projects on time and I'm grateful for all that you did to help us close out projects across the Consortium.

Despite the pandemic, we tried out some new directions for the Consortium this year. The UAV summer residential program at Lawrence University was a successful pilot of a project we hope to continue as part of the Student Satellite Initiatives program. The SSI program is our umbrella for such projects as Collegiate Rocket Launch, Elijah High Altitude Balloon, and Second Stage Space Sciences. Through funding from the NASA Flight Opportunities Program, we are also expanding our Embedded Teacher Program to fly 2-3 teachers on a parabolic research flight each year. Finally, Aerospace Jam is transitioning from a job fair program to a UAV design-build-fly program led by Carroll University and UW – Whitewater. We expect approximately ten teams of high school students from around the state to participate in a simulated lunar landing challenge using kit UAVs developed to allow scientific exploration of the "lunar" surface through remote sensing, measurement, and imaging. The challenge will take place in a drone cage at Fiserv Forum with all attendees invited to attend a Bucks game after the competition.

Non-Base Program Updates: The First Nations Launch program had a very successful year with virtual workshops, distributed launches, and a new series of video tutorials under development to broaden our participation base. FNL has moved to a three-tiered competition featuring a "Gateway" challenge for new teams with no rocketry experience, a "Moon" challenge for teams attempting their first high-power rocket build, and a "Mars" challenge that features a traditional payload-and-avionics build.