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## Engineering faculty well represented in final WID selection

Capping an intensely competitive process, five proposals from University of Wisconsin–Madison faculty have been selected to form the intellectual heart of the [Wisconsin Institute for Discovery \(WID\)](#).

WID is the public half of the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery, complemented by the private Morgridge Institute for Research. Both entities will occupy the new interdisciplinary research facility now under construction in the 1300 block of University Avenue.

Chosen from a final pool of 12 proposals, the five research themes and their faculty leaders selected for inclusion in the new institute are:

- Epigenetics or how genes are activated or inactivated, led by John M. Denu, a professor of biomolecular chemistry in the UW–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.
- Tissue engineering scaffold research, led by [Lih-Sheng Turng](#), UW–Madison professor of [mechanical engineering](#).
- Health Technology Design in the Living Environments Laboratory aimed at accelerating the development of personal care diagnostic and therapeutic technology, led by [Patricia Flatley Brennan](#), professor of [industrial and systems engineering](#) and nursing.
- Optimization in Biology and Medicine, a mathematical approach to minimize or maximize the variables of a given subject, led by [Michael C. Ferris](#), professor of computer science.
- Systems Biology, an integrated, “system level” understanding of living organisms, spearheaded by [John Yin](#), professor of [chemical and biological engineering](#).



Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery building under construction. [\(large image\)](#)



[Lih-Sheng \(Tom\) Turng \(large image\)](#)



[Patricia Flatley Brennan \(large image\)](#)



[Michael C. Ferris \(large image\)](#)



[John Yin \(large image\)](#)

Interim WID Director John D. Wiley, who led the selection process with the WID Program Committee, says the selection of the five research themes to occupy the new institute is a key step in charting the long-term future of a novel interdisciplinary center.

“It was a difficult selection process,” Wiley notes. “We had 12 excellent proposals, and narrowing the list to a select few was hard. But we feel we have identified five areas of research that fit neatly into the mission of WID and will mesh with and enhance the goals and activities of the Morgridge Institute for research.”

The selection of the five WID research themes concludes a process that began nearly three years ago with a call for proposals for the Discovery Seed Grant Initiative, which jump-started WID programming by funding eight projects from a campuswide competition.

The full WID research theme competition, according to Wiley, represented a rare chance for faculty to construct novel programs of research. A key goal of the new institute is to intermingle faculty, staff and students from across campus in interdisciplinary research that can be translated beyond academia and help underpin the future economy of the state.

The selection process for the WID research themes, beginning with a call that elicited 26 pre-proposals, was intense and rigorous, Wiley explains. The WID Program Committee selected 12 pre-proposals for submission as full proposals. Submitted full proposals were peer-reviewed by internal and external expert reviewers, with each proposal receiving at least one external and two internal reviews. Final selection was then made by the WID Program Committee.

“All 26 of the pre-proposals were excellent, so selecting 12 finalists was already a difficult process. Naming only five themes from among the 12 outstanding finalists was even more difficult,” says Wiley, noting that the committee was convinced that many of the good ideas and proposed projects from the pre-proposals and final proposals will be engaged with WID and the Morgridge Institute, regardless of location on campus.

The WID Program Committee included Chancellor Biddy Martin; Provosts or Interim Provosts Patrick Farrell, Julie Underwood and Paul DeLuca; Graduate School Dean Martin Cadwallader; WID Interim Directors Marsha Mailick Seltzer and Wiley; Morgridge Institute Director Sangtae Kim; College of Engineering Dean Paul Peercy; professor and chair of bacteriology Jo Handelsman; professor and chair of physiology Rick Moss; and professor of computer sciences Miron Livny.

The successful faculty proposers will occupy space in the new WID facility which is being constructed with support from the state of Wisconsin

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