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Bill would boost UW-L drug research by \$400,000

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The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse may receive state help in its research efforts to develop drugs from mushrooms and medicinal plants.

A state Senate bill contains \$400,000 for an Emerging Technology Center at the Health Science Center on the UW-L campus.

UW-L has been building a reputation for research focused on new drugs derived from American Indian herbal remedies and wild mushrooms. A UW-L team led by chemistry department chairman Aaron Monte has filed three patents so far and is moving its lead drug candidate into preclinical trials, Monte said.

The \$400,000 would add research technicians and lab equipment in the Health Science Center, Monte said, increasing the likelihood of producing new medicines for the market.

"It not only moves forward the science and education efforts of us faculty, but also can enhance the economic development of western Wisconsin," he said.

The Wisconsin Connecting Opportunity Research and Entrepreneurship Jobs Act bill, known as CORE, also would expand tax credits and grant programs, add initiatives to retain and build existing businesses, and educate and train workers across the state, said state Sen. Julie Lassa, D-Stevens Point, an author of the bill.

A major focus in the bill is commercializing research at the UW System's four-year campuses. About \$2 million would go to WiSys Technology Foundation Inc., which identifies innovative technologies in the UW System and brings them to the marketplace, said Lassa.

The state already invests a lot of money in research and development at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, Lassa said.

"We need to make an investment in the research capabilities of our comprehensive campuses across the state," she said. "With more support through CORE, I think they'll be able do tremendous things."

The bill Tuesday unanimously passed the Senate Committee on Economic Development. Its next stop is the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee, hopefully before the regularly scheduled Senate floor session in mid-January, said Lassa. The bill still would need full Senate and Assembly approval and be signed by the governor to become law.

The bill requires UW-L match the \$400,000 with nonstate funding or in-kind donations. UW-L faculty recently submitted grant proposals to the National Institutes of Health and to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide the match, Monte said.