Members Present: Sanjay Asthana, Bill Busse, Molly Carnes, Cindy Czajkowski, Paul DeLuca, Tom Grist, Jeff Grossman, Cindy Haq, Rick Moss, Javier Nieto, Mary Beth Plane, Pat Remington, Susan Skochelak, Jeff Stearns (phone), Rod Welch, George Wilding

Members Absent: Norm Drinkwater, Susan Goelzer, Greg Nycz

Staff: Tonya Mathison, Ken Mount, Eileen Smith, Karla Thompson

Invited Guests: Robert Golden

Other Guests: Andrew Reiland, ABC for Health

DeLuca called the meeting to order at 5:10pm.

1. Approval of draft December 8, 2008 minutes

Busse moved approval of the draft December 8, 2008 minutes. Moss seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements

Legislative Audit Bureau audit
Smith reported on the entrance conference with the Legislative Audit Bureau. The audit team will be led by Paul Stuiber, Deputy State Auditor for Program Evaluation, and Shelby McCulley, Project Supervisor. The team will analyze the use and outcomes associated with the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) funds including an assessment of the amounts awarded, expenditures, and accomplishments associated with each of the grant areas; a detailed review of a sample of grants; and a review of compliance with grant requirements and with state and federal law. The audit team plans to begin immediately and expects to conclude its work in May.

Approval of MERC subcommittee minutes
Smith reported that a number of outstanding MERC Subcommittee minutes needing approval were sent to the appropriate MERC Subcommittee members by email for review. The approved minutes have been posted on the Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) website.

Wisconsin Partnership Program Policies and Procedures Manual
WPP staff developed a Policies and Procedures Manual which includes five major sections: Governance, Oversight and Advisory Committee, Medical Education and Research Committee, Administration and an Appendix. Smith asked members to review the manual, paying particular attention to the MERC section, and email feedback.
3. MERC Executive Subcommittee report

DeLuca provided an overview of the January 5 Executive Subcommittee meeting. The Subcommittee reviewed a final report for Christina Hull’s New Investigator Program grant, *Investigating Fungal Infection: Analysis of Spores from the Human Fungal Pathogen Cryptococcus neoformans*. There was general agreement that the project was very successful in accomplishing the majority of the stated goals. The Subcommittee was impressed that the project resulted in three publications – two have been submitted and one is in draft form – and led to an R01 submission.

The Subcommittee also discussed the reorganization of MERC, reductions in budgets of current grants, and the targeted reapplications which will be covered later in the meeting.

4. Discussion of reorganization of MERC

Dean Robert Golden presented his recommendations for the reorganization of MERC, as indicated in the 2009-2014 Five-Year Plan:

- Four members appointed by the Dean of the School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) from amongst the SMPH leadership, including the Chair of MERC.
- Three SMPH faculty, one from the Basic Sciences, one from the Clinical Sciences and one from Public Health Sciences. (elected positions)
- One SMPH academic staff. (elected position)
- Two members appointed by the OAC who are the OAC chair and an OAC public member.
- Two chair appointees, one from the Basic Science Chairs Caucus and one from the Council of Clinical Chairs.
- One appointee of the SMPH Dean from outside the SMPH either on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin or a member of the public with expertise in public and community health.

The Dean expressed appreciation for the MERC’s efforts and contributions to the development and implementation of the WPP. He commented on the depth and breadth of the work of the committee during the past five years. He stressed that WPP is at the next stage of development which lends itself to the reorganization of the committee to bring on new members. Discussion then focused on developing a slate of candidates for the four elected positions – three SMPH faculty members and one academic staff person. Smith will follow-up with the candidates to confirm their interest in serving. Terms will be staggered over two or three years. It is anticipated that elections will be held in February or March, and that the reorganized MERC will commence in April.

5. Discuss reductions in budgets of current grants

In order to reduce expenditures by 20%, MERC asked the targeted “focus area” grantees to submit a proposed budget starting April 1, 2009 at 80% of the value of the current award until
the end date of the award. Following a presentation by Mount, Busse moved approval of the implementation of 20% budget reductions as proposed by the following targeted grantees:

- **Development of a Centralized UWCCC Biobank**: Biobank will absorb a majority of the budget cut of $38,157 in year one with the remaining reductions in year two with a total revised budget award of $363,331 for the period March 1, 2008 to February 28, 2010.
- **Health Innovations Program**: Budget cut of $36,638 for a revised budget of $207,612 for the period April 1 to December 31, 2009.
- **Regenerative Medicine Program**: Budget cut of $75,000 for a revised budget of $285,000 for the period April 1 to June 30, 2009, and to $240,000 for the period July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010.
- **Wisconsin Center for Infectious Disease (WisCID)**: WisCID will absorb a majority of the budget cut of $243,702 in year one with the remaining reductions spread over years two to four with a total revised budget award of $1,267,604 for the period July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2012.
- **Wisconsin Network for Health Research (WiNHR)**: Budget cut of $157,032 for a revised budget of $1,188,953 for the period April 1 to October 31, 2009. Smith indicated that Dr. Drezner is planning to submit a reapplication for the Institute of Clinical and Translational Research (ICTR) that integrates WiNHR.

Haq seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Further discussion of spending reductions resulted in a motion by Busse to implement a general practice of reducing the strategic and targeted grants by 20% in order to exercise prudent fiscal management given the declining value of the WPP’s endowment and the ongoing constraints on spending. Grist seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. **Discussion of balanced portfolio between education and research**

Skochelak presented her thoughts on maintaining a balanced portfolio of education and research. She noted that MERC’s funding for the Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine will be concluding and that funding for the Master of Public Health program will gradually be transferred to the School’s budget. She emphasized that the budget reductions may have a significant impact on the percent of funds allocated to education. MERC should be mindful of this as reapplications are considered.

7. **Discuss scope and review of targeted reapplications**

The following grantees are completing reapplications, which include a progress report on the initial award, for consideration by the newly reorganized MERC:

- Education
- Human Proteomics Program
- Institute of Clinical and Translational Research/Wisconsin Network for Health Research
- Survey of the Health of Wisconsin
8. Oversight and Advisory Committee (OAC) report

The OAC report was deferred until February.

9. Discussion of review procedure for Collaborative Health Sciences Program preliminary applications and timeline for review

MERC appointed Paul DeLuca, Norm Drinkwater, Cindy Haq, Rick Moss, Javier Nieto, and Susan Skochelak to review the preliminary applications for the Collaborative Health Sciences Program. Other reviewers will be added as needed. This group will make a recommendation for consideration by MERC on which applicants to invite to submit full applications.

DeLuca adjourned the meeting at 6:50pm.

Recorder, Tonya Mathison