

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: License Agreement between the University of Michigan and Carbon Fuels LLC

Action Requested: Approval of License Agreement

Preamble:

A statutory conflict of interest situation was identified by the Office of Technology Transfer while reviewing the technology transfer agreement that then triggered a review by the UMOR Conflict of Interest Review Committee. A plan for management of the possible risks associated with the conflict of interest was then developed and approved by this Committee and agreed to by the parties involved in this plan.

This proposed license agreement (“Agreement”) falls under the State of Michigan Conflict of Interest Statute because Professor Zetian Mi is an employee of the University of Michigan (“University”) and a partial owner of Carbon Fuels LLC. The law permits such an Agreement provided it is disclosed to the Board of Regents (“Regents”) of the University of Michigan and approved in advance by a 2/3 vote.

Background:

Dr. Zetian Mi, a Professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, is the partial owner of a for-profit company called Carbon Fuels LLC (the “Company”). The Company was formed recently to commercialize inventions for artificial photosynthesis for the production of H₂ and carbon fuels and desires to license from the University of Michigan the University’s rights associated with the following technologies:

UM OTT File No. 2019-384, entitled: “Semiconductor Photoelectrodes and Devices Protected by Multifunctional GaN Nanostructures” (Inventors: Zetian Mi, Srinivas Vanka)

UM OTT File No. 2019-385, entitled: “Semiconductor Photoelectrode and Devices Protected by Two-Dimensional Transition Metal Dichalcogenides” (Inventors: Zetian Mi, Srinivas Vanka)

UM OTT File No. 2019-386, entitled: “A Photochemical Diode Artificial Photosynthesis System” (Inventors: Zetian Mi, Faqrul Chowdbury)

UM OTT File No. 2019-387, entitled: “CO₂ Reduction into Syngas” (Inventors: Zetian Mi, Sheng Chu, Pengfei Ou, Jun Song)

UM OTT File No. 2019-388, entitled: “Gallium Nitride Nanowire as a Linker of Molybdenum Sulfides and Silicon for Photoelectrocatalytic Water Splitting” (Inventors: Zetian Mi, Hong Guo, Xianghua Kong, Baowen Zhou)

The Office of Technology Transfer selected the Company as a University partner and negotiated the terms of the proposed Agreement in accordance with University policy and its accepted licensing principles.

Parties to the Agreement:

The Regents of the University of Michigan and Carbon Fuels LLC

Agreement Terms Include:

Agreement terms include granting the Company an exclusive license with the right to grant sublicenses. The Company will pay a royalty on sales and reimburse patent costs. The University may receive equity in the Company, along with the right to purchase more equity.

The University will retain ownership of the licensed technologies and may continue to further develop it and use it internally. No use of University services or facilities, nor any assignment of University employees, is obligated or contemplated under the Agreement. Standard disclaimers of warranties and indemnification apply, and the Agreement may be amended by consent of the parties, such as adding related technology. University procedures for approval of these changes will be followed and additional conflict of interest review will be done as appropriate.

Pecuniary Interest:

The pecuniary interests of Dr. Mi arise from his ownership interest in Carbon Fuels LLC.

Net Effect:

The Office of Technology Transfer has negotiated and finalized the terms of a license agreement for patents related to UM OTT File Nos. 2019-384, 2019-385, 2019-386, 2019-387, and 2019-388 for all fields of use. Carbon Fuels LLC will obtain use and commercialization rights to the above listed University technologies.

Recommendations:

This matter has been reviewed and approved by the UMOR Conflict of Interest Review Committee. In light of this disclosure and our finding that the Agreement was negotiated in conformance with standard University practices, I recommend that the Board of Regents approve the Agreement between the University and Carbon Fuels LLC.

Respectfully submitted,



Rebecca Cunningham
Interim Vice President for Research

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