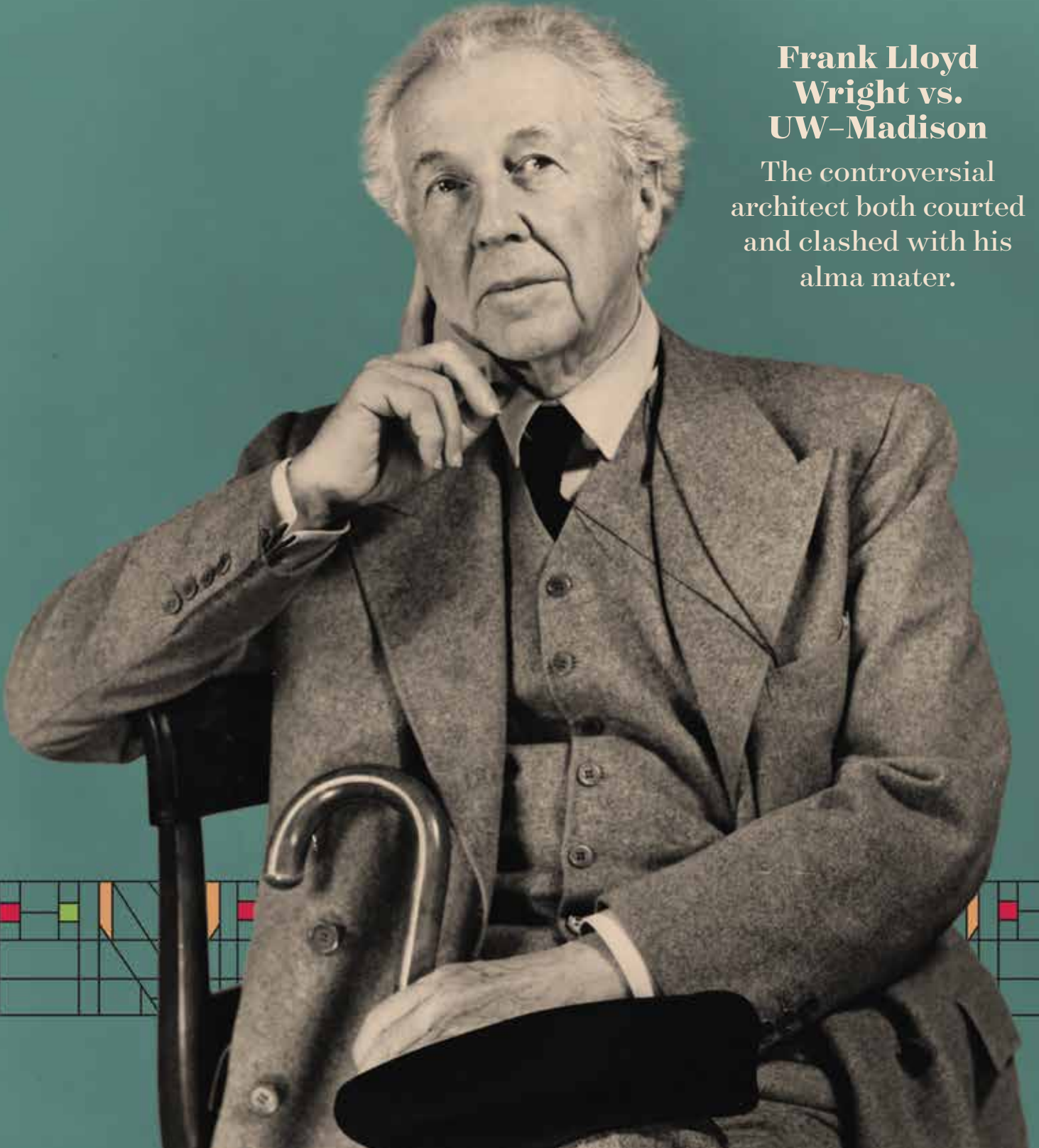


# OnWisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS WINTER 2024

## Frank Lloyd Wright vs. UW-Madison

The controversial  
architect both courted  
and clashed with his  
alma mater.





## **Vision**

No, Badger athletics did not add live-action *Donkey Kong* as a new sport. The Red Gym is undergoing a significant repair of its exterior masonry and having its roof replaced. The project should be completed in 2025, barring interference from barrel-throwing apes.

*Photo by Althea Dotzour*





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# OnWisconsin

The world has questions. UW elections expert Barry Burden has answers. See page 32.

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ALTHEA DOTZOUR

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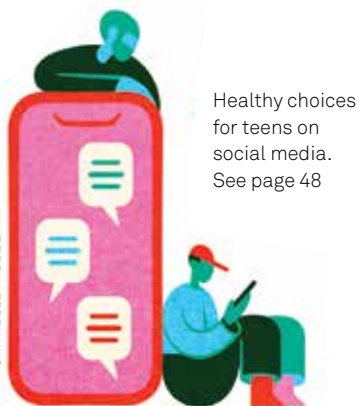


COURTESY OF KATIE STURINO

Katie Sturino founded Megababe to meet the needs of the plus-sized community. See page 38.

#### Cover

Frank Lloyd Wright, the UW's sometime antagonist. Photo illustration; photo by MPI/Getty Images



Healthy choices for teens on social media. See page 48

CHANELLE NIBBELINK

# MY UW

Janet  
Hyde



## I BELIEVE IN THE TRAILBLAZING RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE FACULTY.

After 33 years as a faculty member at UW–Madison, I can say that I really believe in this university. I put the Department of Psychology and the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies in my will because I know what remarkable work each one does.

*Professor Janet Hyde*

[supportuw.org/giftplanning](https://supportuw.org/giftplanning)

# Communications

## Stone Stories

Fabulous article! [“Every Stone Tells a Story,” Fall 2024 *On Wisconsin*]. I love the personal tone. It makes me want to visit the Geology Museum and talk to everyone who has a hand in running it to catch some of their passion. Also, the comment “We don’t know who he associates with” [in associate publisher John Allen’s author bio] had me laughing.

**Andrea Renada**  
*Menomonie, Wisconsin*

## Deeply Touched

The thoughtful and stoic actions of civil rights hero Dion Diamond x’64, as captured in the artfully written feature by George Spencer [“A Freedom Rider’s Perilous Path,” Fall 2024], touched me deeply. The article has been filed in my “Gems of Wisdom” folder.

**Gerald Morsello MS’66**  
*Eugene, Oregon*

## Dueling UWs

I’m a UW–Madison graduate who has worked for UW–Seattle for many years. When I first came to Seattle, I didn’t know what people meant by *U-Dub* (which is how UW is pronounced here most often). I never heard the Wisconsin UW referred to as anything other than *U-Double-U*. Just one small way to tell them apart.

**Diana Mclean Brooking MA’89, MA’91**  
*Seattle*

## The Law of Discontinued Perfection

I always enjoy *On Wisconsin* cover to cover, but the segment on Babcock ice cream in “The VIP Campus Tour” [Fall 2024] brought back happy memories, and a sad one.

On many afternoons during grad school, I ducked over to the Union to get a double-dip cone (okay, sometimes two) of Babcock chocolate chip ice cream. One thing that made it extra special was that it also contained tiny bits of toffee — absolutely heavenly!

I’ve eaten a lot of ice cream since then but never anything that good.

So when I visited campus in July 2023, it was with great anticipation that I ordered my usual cone — only to discover to my horror that it no longer contained the toffee bits! Has the Law of Discontinued Perfection struck again? Can the denizens of Babcock Hall right this egregious wrong and restore the lost luster of this UW treasure? I certainly hope so.

**Jim Rice MS’81,**  
**PhD’85**  
*Raleigh, North Carolina*

## Reliving the Rose Bowl

After reading “Relive the 1994 Rose Bowl” in the Fall 2024 issue, I pulled out one of my favorite sweatshirts from my UW collection. I frequently look at that shirt and smile. And like my fellow alumni, I hope for a repeat. Thanks for the memory!

**Bernie Van Wormer ’69**  
*Warsaw, Indiana*

I really enjoyed “Relive the 1994 Rose Bowl.” A group of us watched the game at a sports bar near campus and decided to continue the postgame celebration by marching down to Camp Randall Stadium. There were only a few of us at first, but then more and more fans started showing up as we stood outside the south gates. Next thing you know, there were over 100 fans congregated, and we all started chanting, “Let us in! Let us in!” Within 15 minutes, the stadium lights turned on, and security guards opened the gates! We all continued the celebration on the field, running around like lunatics, making snow angels — a wonderful community of Rose Bowl champions.

**Todd Laszewski MS’85** and  
**Ruth Laszewski ’85**  
*Wauwatosa, Wisconsin*

We want to hear from you! Please email your letters to [onwisconsin@uwalumni.com](mailto:onwisconsin@uwalumni.com) or mail them to WFAA, On Wisconsin, 1848 University Ave., Madison, WI 53726. You can also post comments online at [onwisconsin.uwalumni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalumni.com).

## Hail the Century Club!

Tell Alexander Melter [Summer 2024 Communications] I hope he makes it to 100. I [recently turned] 100, and my family planned a party to celebrate. I hope to live long enough to read another issue of *On Wisconsin*.

**Dale Bruhn ’48, MS’74**  
*Simpsonville, South Carolina*

## Anyone Have a Frame?

Just a quick note to tell you how much I enjoyed the Fall 2024 issue of *On Wisconsin*, particularly “The VIP Campus Tour” and “The Return of the Guerrilla Cookie” [Tradition].

I have read (and edited) many college alumni magazines over the years, but *On Wisconsin* stands out for its consistently interesting stories and its unmatched ability to both inform alumni and connect us on an emotional level with our beloved alma mater. Congratulations.

**Lynette Lamb ’79**  
*Minneapolis*



## Online



## FIXING THE POLLS

Barry Burden, who is profiled on page 32, is the director of the UW’s Elections Research Center. Visit our website and search for “Can We Trust the Polls?” which explores the center’s cutting-edge analysis of national and state elections. You’ll get a peek into the increasingly tricky business of conducting accurate polls in the age of cell phones and low response rates.

Visit us at [onwisconsin.uwalumni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalumni.com).

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## OnWisconsin

Winter 2024

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JEFF MILLER

## The Robust Exchange of Ideas

An updated policy protects free speech on campus while safeguarding the UW's educational mission.

Following this presidential election season, *On Wisconsin* delves into politics with our page 32 profile of Barry Burden, UW–Madison's internationally renowned political scientist. Burden is highly sought after by the media and the courts for his nonpartisan analysis of topical issues.

As a public university that welcomes diverse viewpoints, the UW itself strives for what administrators call "content-neutrality." That approach came into play last spring during protests of the Israel–Hamas war that occurred here and on many other campuses around the country. On April 29, a group of students set up an encampment on Library Mall in violation of state law, making demands that targeted the university's ties to Israel. On May 1, law enforcement officers dismantled the encampment and arrested several protesters. On May 10, the protesters peacefully took down a second encampment after negotiations with the administration.

In August, UW–Madison clarified its Expressive Activity Policy to ensure that free expression remains protected on campus and that safeguards are in place to maintain the university's mission and operations, including the ability of students to access education without disruption. The policy and an accompanying guide are designed to better help students, employees, and campus visitors understand their rights and responsibilities and the resources available to them. It's part of a broader effort to educate the campus community on all aspects of free expression, provide transparency, and expand civil discourse programming.

"The robust exchange of ideas and viewpoints is central to a university," says Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin. "That is a key part of what a great university does, or should be doing, every day, and it is what we mean, here at UW–Madison, when we talk about fearless sifting and winnowing. That means that we will often engage with ideas and perspectives that may be new to us, and that might, in some cases, cause us unease or discomfort. My hope is that, as a Badger community, we approach our differences with open minds, a willingness to listen, respect for one another, and a generosity of spirit."

DEAN ROBBINS

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**David Anderson**  
Class of '74, JD'89  
Trumpet

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# OnCampus

News from UW-Madison



BRUCE RICHTER

*Paul Lema '22, MSx'26, a graduate student in agroecology, harvests Ho-Chunk corn at the West Madison Agricultural Research Station in September.*

## Fertile Ground for Indigenous Food Sovereignty

*UW researchers are partnering with Wisconsin's tribes to preserve traditional agricultural practices.*

With a \$10 million grant from the USDA, UW-Madison is helping the Great Lakes Tribal nations pursue Indigenous food sovereignty.

According to **Dan Cornelius JD'09**, a lawyer and Oneida Nation farmer who serves as program outreach manager with the UW Law School's Great Lakes Indigenous Law Center, "food sovereignty" is the ability for people to enjoy culturally significant foods and to have access to the land and resources necessary to grow those foods. This project will explore how the UW can support existing efforts to preserve Native foodways, which have been endangered by years of colonization.

"How do we implement climate-smart solutions in a culturally appropriate manner to expand our Indigenous food production?" Cornelius asks.

The UW will work with tribal partners across the state to bolster existing production, storage, and transportation operations of Indigenous food items. The grant also funds a cohort of agroecology students whose research will focus on Indigenous agronomy and food policy.

"Sometimes that term, 'Indigenous foodways,' is equated to farming, and farming isn't big enough," says **Bill Tracy**, a UW agronomy professor who is leading the UW's involvement in the project. "Foodways include deer, fish, manoomin [wild rice], maple syrup, and other wild plants that are eaten and also considered medicines."

This ethos is evident in one of the project's initiatives: the Tribal Elder Food Box Program. The Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition started the program during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide boxes of nutritious, culturally relevant food items to tribal elders throughout the state. In 2023, the program delivered more than 28,000 boxes to elders in 11 tribes. Through this partnership with the UW, they hope to see that number continue to grow.

"The first role that the UW has is listening," Tracy says. "Listening to what people want and what they need, and then finding ways that we can fulfill those needs."

**MEGAN PROVOST '20**



CONTINUUM SMITH GROUP

## LEVY ENGINEERING CENTER RECEIVES \$75 MILLION GIFT

A historic \$75 million gift will fuel construction of UW-Madison's new engineering building. With their lead gift — the largest single gift in college history — brothers **Marvin '68, JD'71** and **Jeffrey '72 Levy** are honoring the memory of their brother, **Phil '64**, who passed away in 2021.

"Through this gift, we can ensure the College of Engineering will remain on the leading edge and educate an ever-expanding number of talented engineers for generations to come," says Marv. "Our family deeply appreciates the vital role engineering plays in driving innovations that advance our society and contribute to people's quality and enjoyment of life. Jeff and I view support of this new engineering building as a gift to the state of Wisconsin."

In eight total stories (seven above ground, one below), the 395,000-square-foot Phillip A. Levy Engineering Center will allow the College of Engineering to expand its enrollment and amplify its positive effects on people, communities, businesses, and industries everywhere.

"We aren't engineers," says Jeff, "but we are engineering a great campus."

**RENEE MEILLER '95**



## University Square Shopping Center

The last campus-area commercial movie theater closed two decades ago.

In May 1975, the UW community became the center of Madison's cinematic universe with the opening of the University Square Four: "Madison's 1st Four-Theatre Entertainment Center," according to ads. Patrons could go to just one address — the corner of University Avenue and Park Street — and have their choice of four different films.

Or rather three films, on the day the theater opened. Screens one and two both showed *Gone in 60 Seconds*, while three had *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and four had *Chinatown*. Not every-

one was upbeat about the opening. Projectionists Local 251 picketed in front of the doors, asking for higher pay from U Square Four's owner, American Multi-Cinema (AMC). AMC responded that U Square was fully automated and so didn't need full-time projectionists. But in spite of the unpromising start, U Square Four lasted 30 years.

The University Square shopping center contained more than a movie theater, of course. Its single story covered 60,000 square feet, taking up much of the south side of the 700 block of University Avenue. It hosted the Discount Den (later just the Den); it was the original home for Madhatter bar; and it was the longest-lived of the many locations for Paisan's Italian restaurant.

In 2001, U Square's ownership announced a plan to redevelop the old shopping center, replacing it with a multistory structure that includes an apartment building (The Lucky) and UW offices. It



*A view from University Avenue: University Square, as it looked in the 1980s, when its lineup included a B. Dalton bookstore and a copy shop. Above right: a newspaper ad for the theater's opening.*

took a few years for that plan to become a reality, but in 2006, U Square closed. The Den shut down in 2005. Madhatter moved to West Gorham, where it lasted another decade. Paisan's moved to West Wilson, where it kept going until 2022.

But the theater had nowhere to go. Perhaps it was the revenge of Projectionists Local 251.

JOHN ALLEN



EA SPORTS

## Badger Football Is Back in the (Video) Game

*UW–Madison has a starring role in College Football 25.*

After more than a decade hiatus, college football is back in video game form with this year's release of *College Football 25* by EA Sports. When you fire up your Xbox or PlayStation, you'll find the Wisconsin Badgers well represented on screen. Camp Randall Stadium, Bucky Badger, the marching band, and a majority of the UW's roster all contribute to a virtual Game Day experience that rivals the real thing.

The return of the video game was made possible by the NCAA's recent reforms that allow student-athletes to profit from the use of their name, image, and likeness. It's the first installment of the series, which dates to 1993, to feature real players. The Badgers are led by defensive backs **Ricardo Hallman x'26** and **Hunter Wohler x'25**, who earned 90-plus ratings and a place among the top 100 players in the game. Every participating student-athlete received a \$600 payment and a free copy of the game.

"To be on the game that you grew up [with] as a little kid is a really cool experience," Hallman said after its release. "I've been [playing it] every day, honestly."

*College Football 25* captures an impressive amount of detail of the Camp Randall experience, from the stadium's design, to the crowd's "First and 10, Wisconsin" chant, to a postgame scene of UW players celebrating with Paul Bunyan's Axe after beating Minnesota. While featuring all 134 Division I programs, the game ranked Camp Randall as the seventh-toughest place to play in the nation, at least virtually.

But you'll also notice a few differences. The UW's student section is always full at kickoff (an artistic liberty we endorse). Real coaches aren't featured, so you won't see **Luke Fickell** roaming the sidelines. And EA Sports couldn't secure the licensing rights to "Jump Around." Instead, the song "Tsunami" plays as the crowd jumps between the third and fourth quarters.

That change alone is a good reason to return to Camp Randall — in person.

**PRESTON SCHMITT '14**



VOCES DE LA FRONTERA

The late **Vel Phillips LLB'51** was the first Black woman to graduate from the UW–Madison Law School, the first Black person elected to Milwaukee's common council, and Wisconsin's first Black secretary of state. In yet another breakthrough, the indomitable civil rights champion has become the first person of color honored with a statue on the Wisconsin capitol grounds — right where she belongs.

As if Game Day weren't enjoyable enough, **Camp Randall is offering new features for the 2024 football season**, including an enhanced LED video-board display in the north end zone and a heating system under the turf to prepare for possible College Football Playoff games in December (hey, it'll happen one day!). And now that tickets are fully digital, fans can download the Badgers App to make a trip to the stadium as easy as can be.



BRUCE RICHTER

One of UW–Madison's most controversial structures is on the chopping block. The Universities of Wisconsin has made tearing down the problematic Mosse Humanities Building a top priority in the 2025–27 state budget. System leaders hope to demolish the concrete behemoth by 2030 and relocate tenants to new spaces.

## The UW's Five Hottest Certificates

Students increasingly supplement their majors with a career-boosting course of study.

More and more UW–Madison students are choosing to get certificates to round out their education and give their résumés — and future careers — a boost. There were 4,210 undergraduate certificates awarded in 2022–23, compared with 1,544 a decade earlier. A certificate, like a minor at other universities, supplements a major and focuses on a specific subject area. It can also integrate multiple subject areas. Certificate programs typically span 15 to 24 credits

but are not required to graduate.

“UW–Madison faculty and staff have excelled at highlighting the breadth and depth of expertise we have on campus by developing over 100 certificate programs,” says **Kelley Harris PhD’08**, director of Cross-College Advising Service.

Here are the undergraduate certificate programs that have added the most students from fall 2019 to fall 2023.

MIKE KLEIN





ETHAN C. PARRISH PH.D'24

**Glaciers Are Shrinking — But How Much?**

*UW research charts the changing climate's effect on global ice.*

As they are in many places around the globe, glaciers perched high in the Andes Mountains are shrinking. UW-Madison researchers and their collaborators have uncovered evidence that the high-altitude tropical ice fields are likely smaller than they've been at any time since the last ice age ended 11,700 years ago.

That would make the tropical Andes the first region in the world known to pass that threshold as a result of the steadily warming global climate. It also makes them possible harbingers of what's to come for glaciers globally.

Satellite imagery and on-the-ground observations have provided conclusive evidence for decades that high-altitude glaciers in the Andes are steadily shrinking as warmer temperatures cause them to melt more quickly than falling snow can replenish them. What has remained unclear, though, is how the shrinkage compares to the rest of the period that began at the end of the last ice age, known as the Holocene.

"We knew that glaciers ebbed and flowed in the past, so we wanted to learn how the behavior of glaciers today — melting due to human-caused climate change — stacks up against their long-term fluctuations," says **Andy Jones MS'21, PhDx'26**, the study's coauthor (above right at Bolivia's Zongo Glacier with **Yasmeen Orellana Salazar MS '24** and **Matias Romero PhDx'27**).

To answer this question, the team of scientists analyzed the geochemistry of bedrock from areas near the edges of four glaciers in the high tropical Andes, choosing sites that satellite imagery showed were exposed by melting ice in only the last two or three decades. This research points to a single likely conclusion, according to UW geoscience professor **Shaun Marcott**: the world's tropical glaciers are the first to shrink beyond what's been seen in the recent geologic past.

"Glaciers are very sensitive to the climate system that they live in," says Marcott. "They really are the place you would look to see some of the first big changes resulting from a warming climate. You can look to these glaciers and imagine what we might be looking at going into the future in other places like the western United States, which is a no-ice scenario."

**WILL CUSHMAN MS'16**



ELLIOTT CONNOR

**It's bronze-plaque time for Brianna Decker x'13, the first former UW women's hockey player to be inducted into the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame.**

Decker was a member of the Badgers' NCAA championship team in 2011 and won the Patty Kazmaier Award as national player of the year in 2012. Her stellar postcollege career included a 2018 Olympic gold medal with Team USA and two MVP awards in the National Women's Hockey League.



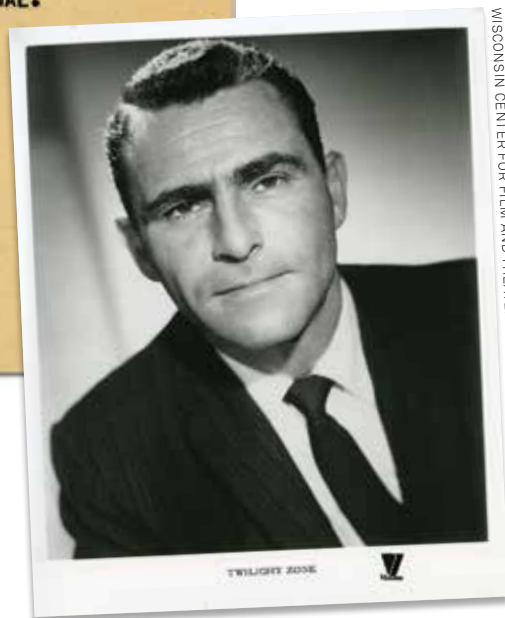
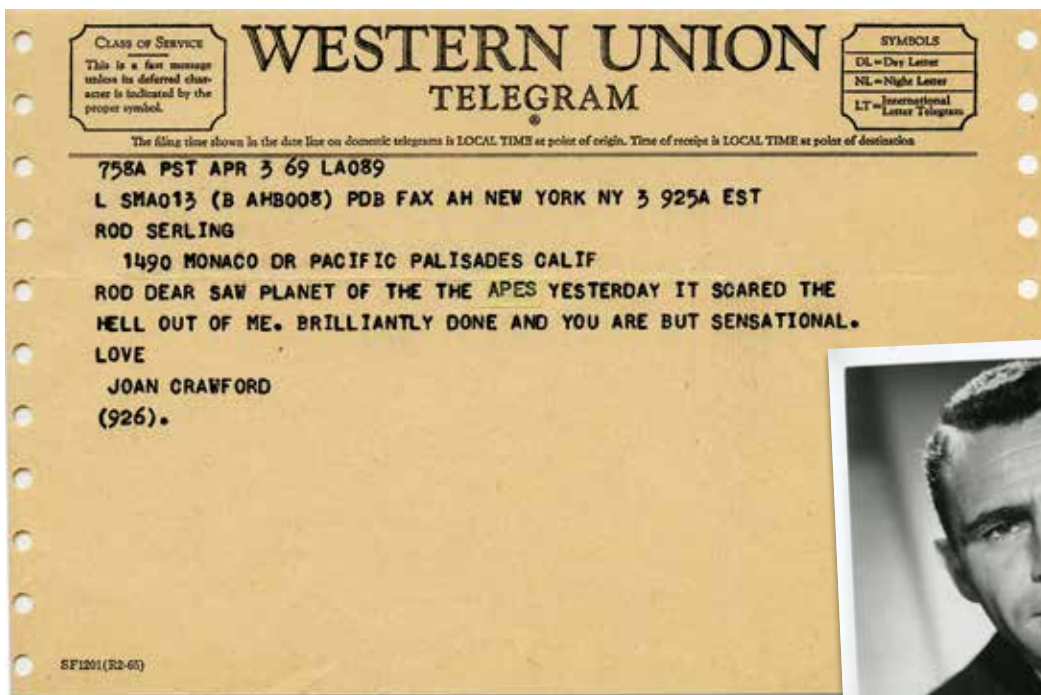
BRUCE RICHTER

**Is UW-Madison likely to win any popularity contests?**

The answer appears to be yes. The university selected its fall freshman class of 8,516 students from a record 65,933 applicants.

**The newest project for the Wisconsin Research, Innovation, and Scholarly Excellence (RISE) Initiative, called RISE-THRIVE,**

seeks to translate medical discoveries and innovative social science approaches into healthier lives for people around the world. It will accomplish this goal through accelerated and strategic faculty hiring, research and infrastructure improvements, interdisciplinary collaboration, and enhanced student opportunities. RISE-THRIVE is the third Wisconsin RISE initiative, joining RISE-AI (covering artificial intelligence) and RISE-EARTH (sustainability).



## Entering *The Twilight Zone* — via UW–Madison

Science fiction icon Rod Serling gave the university a collection of his classic scripts and stories.

From 1959 to 1964, Rod Serling cast a spell on TV viewers as the creator, writer, and deep-voiced host of *The Twilight Zone*. The science fiction anthology series ventured into “the middle ground between light and shadow,” to quote Serling’s weekly intro, intoned with an exquisite sense of foreboding. The black-and-white episodes used aliens, robots, and monsters to present eerie morality tales, addressing the social ills that troubled Serling: racism, war, conformity, cruelty.

The show’s signature device was a twist ending that drove each message home — and that, throughout decades of reruns, often sent terrified children scrambling behind the couch. That’s where I spent much of my childhood, peeking over the cushions to experience Serling’s unearthly visions in such episodes as “Eye of the Beholder” and “It’s a Good Life.”

Serling had no connection to Wisconsin but, in a *Twilight Zone*-style twist, donated his sizable archive to UW–Madison’s Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research in 1963. It was the result of pure hustle: then-director **David Knauf** boldly wrote Serling a letter to see if he would be willing to hand over documents.

“Serling liked the idea of students being able to use his collection to learn from,” says **Mary Huelsbeck**, the center’s current assistant director. “He responded quickly, and we were the first to have this material.”

In the archive, scholars and fans can find scripts for *The Twilight Zone* and other socially engaged productions that elevated the television medium in the 1950s and ’60s. There are also Serling scripts for the enduring 1968 fantasy film *Planet of the Apes* and the 1970s TV horror series *Night Gallery* — another

*The UW’s Serling archive includes a rapturous fan letter from movie star Joan Crawford.*

To hear a recording of Serling dictating one of his scripts, see this article on our website, [onwisconsin.uwalmuni.com](http://onwisconsin.uwalmuni.com).

one best viewed from behind the couch. Other material includes speeches for various good causes, a delightful fan letter from movie star Joan Crawford, and communications with TV executives nervous about Serling’s controversial ideas.

Sifting through all this stuff, Huelsbeck says, you sense “a really nice guy who could also be a tough guy when he needed to be.”

Coolest of all, the UW has 1,200 recordings of Serling dictating his scripts via old-school Dictabelt technology.

“He was busy, so he didn’t type out his scripts,” says Huelsbeck. “It’s amazing to hear how quickly Serling could think while writing these scripts in his head.”

After listening to one of the Dictabelt recordings, I would have to agree. But just hearing that haunting voice again scared me silly.

**DEAN ROBBINS**



## Seeking: Qualified Dance Teachers

*A new certificate equips future educators to integrate movement in the classroom.*

There's a high demand for dance in K-12 schools, and not enough educators are offering it, according to **Chell Parkins**, the director of dance education in the UW Dance Department.

"What I hear consistently from teachers is that most people don't feel well equipped to teach dance in their physical education programs," she says.

Now, the Dance Department is offering a certificate program aimed at undergraduate students with an interest in dance education. The 14-credit program in dance education, which launched this fall, will prepare them for a variety of careers that involve teaching dance or integrating dance in educational settings.

The certificate, while not a teacher-licensing program, will be valuable for dance majors who wish to expand their career options beyond performance. "When students go out into the world, they are likely going to be teaching — in community settings, in companies, in private studios, in schools," says Parkins. "The dance education certificate will train them specifically in pedagogical strategies for teaching dance."

The certificate program is unique in the nation in its focus on cultivating students' cultural awareness and sensitivity.

"Understanding and experiencing culture through all styles of dance enhances relationships and appreciation among human beings," says **Jin-Wen Yu**, chair of the Dance Department.

The dance education certificate advances UW-Madison's commitment to being a leader within the field.

"As the birthplace of dance education, nearly a hundred years ago, this is a really important historical site," says Parkins. "People are watching what's going on in Wisconsin."

**KARI DICKINSON MA'04**



JACK ECKE



UW-Madison's ranking among national public universities in *Washington Monthly's* 2024 College Guide and Rankings. *Washington Monthly* rates schools "based on what they do for the country," and its rankings are tied to an institution's contribution to the public good in three categories: social mobility, research, and opportunities for public service. "Public universities have a mission to provide an education both inside and outside of the classroom so that our students become more active, thoughtful, and well-rounded citizens of the world," says Provost **Charles Isbell**.

*"When you get to your first classes this week, introduce yourself to the person next to you. Be curious. Even if you don't become friends, we all appreciate feeling seen, and doesn't it feel nice when someone says hello?"*

— Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs **Lori Reesor** at the New Student Convocation, September 3 at the Kohl Center



PAUL L. NEWBY II

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP: NOW A MAJOR

This fall, the Wisconsin School of Business offered an entrepreneurship major for the first time.

The new option will be ideal for double majors, says **Dan Olszewski '87**, Goldberg Family Director of the Weinert Center for Entrepreneurship. It gives students a chance to combine entrepreneurship with another area of expertise. “This allows students to obtain deep domain expertise in a field but also augment that with knowing they want to start a business in the future, which makes for a really powerful combination,” he says.

Previously, courses on entrepreneurship were an option under the management and human resources major. But now, entrepreneurship, management, and human resource management will all be stand-alone majors.

Experiential learning is an important component of the new major, and electives include classes where students learn to build and assess their own start-ups. An introductory course will include students from both within and outside the business school, providing valuable experience working on the cross-functional teams typical of many real-world start-ups.

Olszewski says entrepreneurial thinking — skills and mindsets characterized by curiosity, ambition, and creativity — is in high demand among employers.

“We’ve found that big companies are now valuing the entrepreneurial mindset so much more than they used to,” he says. “They realize that they need to be an innovative company to survive in the future, so firms are seeking that out.”

**CLARE BECKER**

## BRAIN CELL GRAFTS OFFER HOPE AGAINST PARKINSON’S

UW–Madison researchers have successfully performed a brain cell graft in monkeys, a technique that shows promise for treating Parkinson’s disease.

Parkinson’s disease damages neurons in the brain that produce dopamine, a chemical that transmits signals between nerve cells. The disrupted signals make it progressively harder to coordinate even simple movements, causing the rigidity, slowness, and tremors that are the disease’s hallmark symptoms. Working with potential cell therapies to treat Parkinson’s disease is a particular specialty of medical physics professor **Marina Emborg**.

Emborg’s team worked with colleagues at the National Primate Research Center to study cynomolgus macaque monkeys. The scientists were successful in reversing Parkinson’s symptoms by grafting neurons grown from the monkeys’ own cells, called an autologous transplant. A new study by a California firm, Aspen Neuroscience, then tested the technique in humans, providing hope for those struggling with a debilitating disease.

“Our results were all so exciting,” Emborg says. “And then, when I saw they had been able to begin with a human patient this spring, I just had tears in my eyes.”

**CHRIS BARNCARD**



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

## The Name’s Badger. Bucky Badger.

The start of an academic year brings a crop of new faculty members, who receive a warm welcome at Chancellor **Jennifer L. Mnookin**’s official residence. At this year’s event, a certain friendly badger introduced himself to **Alison Rollins**, an incoming assistant professor of English, who had the presence of mind to hold tight to her baby stroller when turning to discover the unusually furry guest. To judge from Rollins’s expression, she knows it’s fun times ahead on the UW campus.

## A Breakthrough in Fusion Research

*The UW paves the way for a clean energy source.*

A fusion device at UW–Madison generated plasma for the first time, opening the door to making the highly anticipated, carbon-free energy source a reality.

Over the past four years, a team of UW–Madison physicists and engineers has been constructing and testing the fusion energy device, known as WHAM, in the UW’s Physical Sciences Lab. It transitioned to operations mode last summer, marking a major milestone for the yearslong research project.

“The outlook for decarbonizing our energy sector is just much higher with fusion than anything else,” says **Cary Forest ’86**, a UW–Madison physics professor who has helped lead the development of WHAM. “[Generating] plasma is a crucial first step for us in that direction.”

Fusion is a type of nuclear energy that produces relatively harmless, carbonless waste products, making it one of the cleanest potential energy sources in terms of greenhouse gases.

“We think fusion will be as good at producing electricity as any energy source would be, and we think it might be even better to use it as a source of industrial heat for making things,” Forest says.

Fusion occurs naturally in our sun and other stars to create heat and energy. Researchers have tried to replicate this process with fusion devices known as mirror machines, which limit the escape of particles from the main reactor with inward-facing magnets. But an inability to efficiently contain the plasma — and therefore to achieve net-positive energy production — had greatly limited the function of the machines until recently. Over the last decade, scientists have developed high-temperature superconductor magnets that are tens of times stronger than the magnets previously used for fusion research.

With these powerful magnets, the UW–Madison team is revisiting mirror machines as plasma energy reactors. When they succeeded in generating plasma, it marked the first step in a new age of fusion research at the university.

**SARAH PERDUE ’02**



BRUCE RICHTER



UW HEALTH

## 20,000 GIFTS OF LIFE

Wisconsin resident Gary Grosklau (above) was eager to bring in the fall’s cranberry harvest. He hadn’t been able to work with his cousins at the family marsh for two years as he waited for the gift of two new organs.

That gift arrived in the form of a simultaneous pancreas–kidney transplant last February, marking the noteworthy milestone of 20,000 organs transplanted at the UW Health Transplant Center.

“Every transplant we do is significant for us and life-changing to the patient, and their successful recovery is what motivates us to do this work,” says transplant surgeon **Jennifer Philip**, an assistant professor of surgery at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

The UW program performed its first kidney transplant in 1966 and is now the first and only transplant program in the Midwest to surpass 20,000 transplanted organs.

As of February 20, the day of Grosklau’s surgery, UW physicians had transplanted 12,402 kidneys, 3,167 livers, 1,971 pancreases, 1,449 lungs, 981 hearts, and 30 intestines. Patients traveled to Madison from all 50 states and several countries to receive the gift of life.

“We are developing better ways to preserve and restore organs from deceased donors, and research is helping us expand organ availability every year,” says **Dixon Kaufman**, medical director at the UW Health Transplant Center and professor of surgery at the School of Medicine and Public Health. “I am hopeful it will not take another five decades to reach the next 20,000 organs transplanted.”

Grosklau turned 57 in March, surrounded by family and friends.

“I have more zip,” he says, “and I am getting stronger every day.”

**JESSIE GERACI-PEREZ**



UW ATHLETICS

## ALCOHOL SALES AT CAMP RANDALL

This fall, Wisconsin Athletics began selling alcoholic beverages in the general seating areas at Camp Randall Stadium and in the Field House, home to the women's volleyball and men's wrestling teams.

With the sale of beer, wine, and products such as hard seltzers, UW–Madison will become the 16th school in the Big Ten to sell alcohol in its football stadium's general seating area.

"The option to purchase alcohol is common at collegiate athletic venues all over the country, and we're glad that we can now offer it as part of the fan experience at Camp Randall," says Chancellor **Jennifer L. Mnookin**. "I appreciate the work our athletic and administrative teams have done to put together a plan that balances this opportunity with public safety."

The new plan mirrors policies that were already in place at the Kohl Center and the LaBahn Arena, and fans at Camp Randall are limited to purchasing only two drinks at a time per person. The UW Police Department provides an increased on-site presence, and fans will continue to have access to a text line to report any problems. Additionally, anyone who appears to be under the age of 40 will need to show ID, which will be verified by an electronic scanner.

A portion of alcohol-sales revenue will provide support for campus efforts to promote responsible behavior around the use of alcohol.



BRUCE RICHTER

## Peer Advisers Head Back to the Country

*A campus initiative promotes higher ed in rural areas.*

**McKenna Riley x'25** (above right) loved growing up in the small town of Rockland, Wisconsin. She also loves attending a Big Ten university with more than 50,000 students. She melds these two worlds as a rural peer adviser for UW–Madison's College for Rural Wisconsin (CRW) program.

Rural peer advisers are current college students who fan out to rural schools and communities to answer questions, provide information, and share first-person insights with students, parents, and high school counselors. The initiative works to increase college access for rural, farm, and small-town students in Wisconsin, regardless of whether they choose to apply to UW–Madison or elsewhere.

Traditionally, many universities invite prospective students to come to them, which might not be financially or logistically feasible for some rural students, says **Jennifer Blazek MS'10, MA'10**, CRW's director. "While we can't bring the whole campus to rural students, we can bring a lot of the materials and the mentoring and the support to them," she says.

Growing up, Riley knew of only one person who attended UW–Madison. "I hope to be able to give the sort of help to students and families that I wish I had got as a kid," she says. "I'm eager to share what I've learned about going to college to anyone who wants to listen."

CRW adviser **Avery Simpson x'25** (above center, with **Jack Taylor x'26** on the left) grew up 30 minutes from Madison, but she says city life was largely foreign to her before college. "As strange as it seems, I really worried about crossing the streets," she says, "and I had never been on a city bus."

Simpson is majoring in elementary education and hopes to teach middle school students one day, ideally in rural Wisconsin. Getting to talk to so many rural students as a peer adviser has given her insights into their challenges, she says.

"We get a lot of questions about finances. ... Also, they want to know if college is really worth it. I think it is [so] impactful for them to get to sit down with someone face to face who is already in college and talk about that."

**DOUG ERICKSON**

## Phoebe in Paris

How did you spend your summer? A UW swimmer reached for Olympic glory in the backstroke.

You don't want to compete with **Phoebe Bacon** x'25 in an essay contest on the topic of "How I Spent My Summer Vacation." Her trip to Paris, with 30 or so family members and friends, was probably more dramatic than anything you did. Bacon, a UW swimmer, competed in the Olympic Games, taking fourth place in the backstroke.

That means you probably wouldn't want to compete against Bacon in swimming, either, unless you're one of the three women on Earth who can swim the backstroke faster than she does. Bacon may have just missed the medal stand, but her career is on the rise.

Bacon grew up in the Washington, DC, area, and she came to UW-Madison for three reasons: "One was obviously the academics," she says. "I would graduate with a really, really good degree. The second piece was the team. I felt right at home. And the third piece was head coach **Yuri Suguiyama**. I had a dream of being an Olympian, and I knew Yuri could get me there."

Suguiyama has coached high-profile athletes, including Katie Ledecky and Ryan Murphy, both of whom have multiple Olympic gold medals. At the UW, he also coaches Bacon for her collegiate competitions — a season that runs from October through March. Bacon says that Olympic swimming presents a bigger emotional challenge, but Suguiyama prepared her for the drama.

"Yuri's been a big help," she says. "He will tell it to me straight. It'll be like, 'Phoebe, there's going to be a lot of emotion. Good, bad, ugly. You will see it, and you will feel it all, and all we can try and do is manage it as best we can.' Having that on

my side streamlines my ability to be able to manage it."

Bacon's Paris race may have ended 0.04 seconds short of a medal, but her racing career is far from over, and she may try again in Los Angeles at the 2028 Olympics. But her first goal after Paris was just to try to relax and have a little summer vacation.

"I did a little sleeping," she says. "I was hanging around with my family, being present, seeing them. My family means a lot to me, and spending time with them was super important. It'd been almost nine months since I'd been home."

JOHN ALLEN



*Bacon's Olympic coach warned her to prepare for "a lot of emotion. Good, bad, ugly."*

## How to Study a Star

Astronomy professor Melinda Soares-Furtado has her sights set light-years beyond our solar system.

Devoured worlds and cannibal stars may sound like sci-fi fodder, but for astrophysicist **Melinda Soares-Furtado**, they're what keep her busy on a normal day in the office.

Soares-Furtado is an assistant professor in the UW Department of Astronomy. Her research examines the ages and characteristics of stars and their planetary companions, the interactions between them, and what happens when those interactions end in planetary ingestion.

"It's weird to think that stars are cannibalizing their own planets all the time," Soares-Furtado says.

It's also revealing. "Even in these planets' end-of-life demise, there is information about what they were composed of, which can tell you things about how they were made."

These planetary engulfment events also leave behind chemical fingerprints that Soares-Furtado and her colleagues use to determine the composition of an ingested world and how those materials might influence the observable properties of the cannibalizing star.

But since humans first crossed Earth's outermost atmosphere into space, astronomy has been about more than studying celestial bodies well beyond our reach — and so, too, is Soares-Furtado's curriculum. In her introductory astronomy course, she pairs the calculations and scientific modeling that earn her students a quantitative-course credit with humanities-based discussions about studying space.

"Being part of the College of Letters & Science, there is this ability to bring a liberal arts lens to thinking about what it

means to be a human being in the solar system," Soares-Furtado says, "to recognize the ways that our species is spreading out beyond the planet into low-Earth orbit and exploring the solar system, and to think about how that opens up new frontiers of exploration and discovery."

### ***How does this interdisciplinary approach enrich your students' understanding of astronomy?***

In addition to a cumulative, quantitative final, I have a mastery demonstration project where students can choose whether they want to take a midterm exam or to write something. I also have a media component if they want to do something more artistic, like an infographic. Maybe they want to go deep and think about a NASA mission, or about space debris mitigation, or about the lack of policy on who has rights to mine the moon. ... I'm trying to be very mindful of what's expected for a quantitative course, but also of where there is some ability to introduce opportunities for students to engage with an astronomy course with a fair bit of math in ways that really resonate with them.

### ***You were part of a team that recently discovered the nearest and youngest terrestrial-sized planet. Any other resemblances to our Earth?***

The star it's orbiting is incredibly Sun-like in terms of its mass, its properties, even its abundance of iron and other elements. So we have a host star that, for all intents and purposes, is a young sun, and that

terrestrial world we found is one of three worlds that are orbiting that star. ... As we continue to collect data and go back to the same star, we know that if there are more transiting objects there, we should see them.

### ***The more you learn, does your research yield more answers or more questions?***

I don't know that I have a feeling of the cumulative number of questions or answers getting smaller or larger. I know that I feel that one lifetime is not enough.

### ***You collect vintage astronomy textbooks. Do you have a favorite?***

I really love textbooks from the 1920s and 1930s. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin is one phenomenal example of a writer who's kind of eccentric but a brilliant astronomer. She'll have a Goethe quote as she's talking about clusters of stars, and she'll introduce these clusters as the protagonist of a play. There's just such a wit, a humor, a direct connection to the reader — a thoughtfulness without trying to wax poetic.

### ***Your other hobbies — gardening, hiking, birding — observe the natural world here on Earth. Why not study that?***

Astronomy is the world of abstraction. ... Earth I can engage with and learn about in a way I would not possibly be able to with other planets unless I was physically there taking the data and analyzing it. I think that's why I devoted my life to that work, on some level. ... All of that would be so out of reach unless I spent my life thinking about it.

Interview by Megan Provost '20  
Photo by Althea Dotzour



*Soares-Furtado: "It's weird to think that stars are cannibalizing their own planets all the time."*



# UW-MADISON'S MOST FAMOUS FRENEMY

*The combative architect Frank Lloyd Wright  
x1890 had an intense love-hate relationship  
with his alma mater.*

**BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14**





*Wright had a prickly personality and a contrarian streak.*



## FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

x1890 is among UW–Madison’s most famous alumni, and perhaps atop the list considering the architect’s 1,000-plus

commissions across the world over seven decades.

Wright was controversial for his scandalous love life, and his work was long scorned before being widely embraced as genius. His prickly personality and contrarian streak did little to boost his reputation among contemporaries. He memorably said that he preferred “honest arrogance” to “hypocritical humility.”

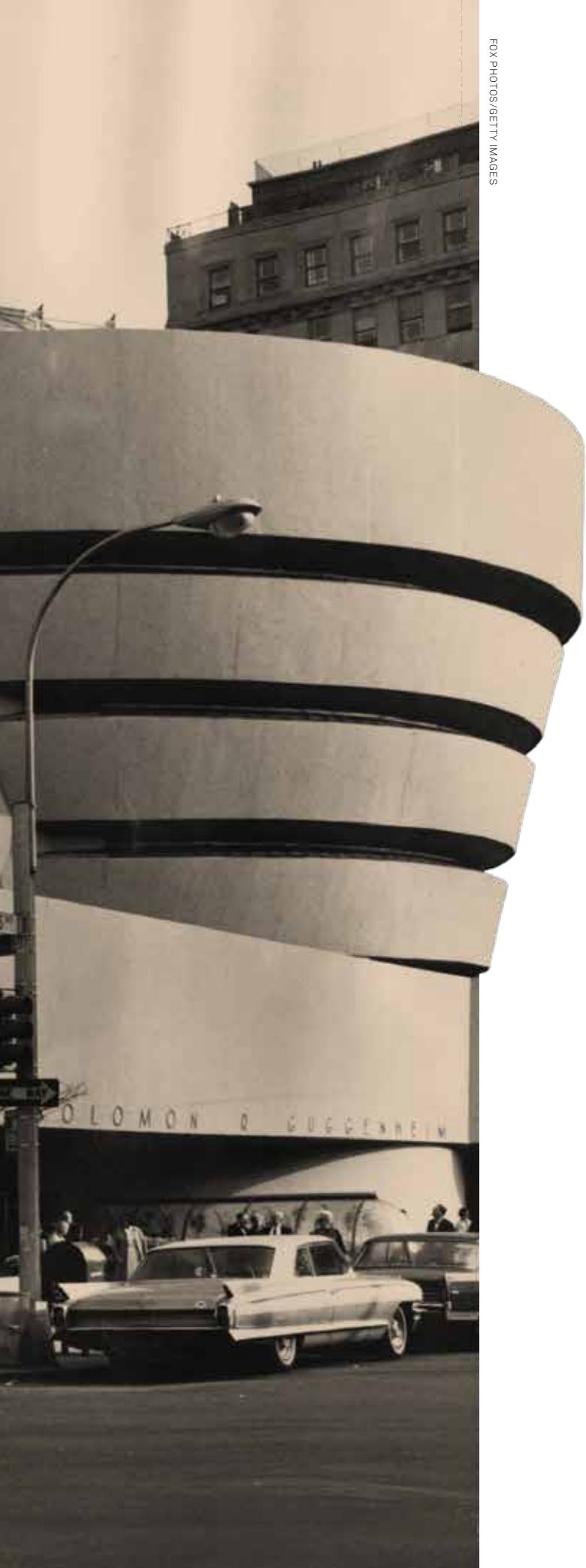
And yet, as this magazine put it in a 1949 profile, “in the end he has usually won his point.” Just as visionaries do, no matter how long it takes.

Wright spent his formative years in Madison and lived an hour west in Spring Green for much of his adult life. That proximity forged a lifelong bond between the architect and his home university, one of mutual admiration but shared skepticism. He stayed in regular touch with the UW until his death at 91, in between working on his iconic designs for the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Fallingwater in Pennsylvania, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

So here are seven tales about Frank Lloyd Wright and the UW, showing what happens when a proud radical collides with a buttoned-up institution.

*By the time his Guggenheim Museum opened in 1959, the controversial Wright was widely embraced as a genius.*





FOX PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

## 1 Wright falsely claimed that he attended the UW for three and a half years.

Throughout his life, Wright spoke of his university years as a coming-of-age story. In his telling, at the age of 15 — reeling from his parents’ divorce and ready to leave behind family farm work in Spring Green — he enrolled at the UW as a civil engineering student.

“Architecture, at first his mother’s inspiration, then naturally enough his own desire, was the study he wanted,” Wright wrote in an autobiography, referring to himself in third person. “But there was no money to go away to an architectural school.”

Once he arrived at the UW, disappointed by the lack of an architectural curriculum, Wright found “little meaning in the studies.” He claimed that just a few months before he was to receive his degree, he “ran away from school to go to work in some real architect’s office in Chicago.”

But the real story is a bit less inspiring.

After Wright’s death, historians discovered major discrepancies between the former student’s recollections and the university’s official records. Transcripts revealed that Wright enrolled at the UW in January 1886 and stayed for just two terms, that spring and the next fall. He was listed as a “special student,” likely because he didn’t finish high school. Only two courses showed completed grades: “average” in descriptive geometry and drawing.

The UW became aware of the divergent accounts as early as 1955, when it was preparing to award Wright an honorary degree for lifetime achievement.

“Wright’s statement and our record obviously do not jibe,” read an internal memo from mathematics professor Rudolph Langer. He acknowledged that “records are pretty faulty for the years before 1887,” but no evidence has turned up since to suggest an error. And in 2012, UW Archives found a progress report that included a note from Wright’s rhetoric professor that he “failed to appear in class.”

Puzzling biographers even more, Wright also claimed that he was born in 1869. In truth, he was born in 1867, which means that he actually enrolled at the UW around age 18 — just like most of us.

*Working on Science Hall is where Wright “really learned most” during his UW student days.*



## 2 Wright got his start in architecture as a part-time assistant on Science Hall.

Wright never minced words about his time at the UW, whatever its length.

“The retrospect of university years is mostly dull pain,” he wrote in his autobiography. “Thought of poverty and struggle, pathos of a broken home, unsatisfied longings, humiliations — frustration.”

And if all that weren’t depressing enough: “The inner meaning of nothing came clear.”

To Wright, only mathematics made any sense. And even then, he called his professor, Charles Van Velzer, an “academic little man” who “opened for his pupil the stupendous fact that two plus two equal[s] four.” Ever the idealist, Wright believed the math professor should have approached his teachings as a poet would.

Wright still lived with his mother and sisters while in college, walking two miles to campus each day. Yearbook pages show that he joined the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, the University Choral Club, and the UW Association of Engineers.

With his mother’s help, Wright secured a job with Allan Conover 1874, 1876, a UW professor of civil

engineering who operated a private practice. Still a student, Wright was hired as a part-time assistant and draftsman. At the time, Conover was overseeing the construction of the new Science Hall after the original burned down in 1884. The new building was one of the first in the world to be constructed largely of structural steel, and Wright apparently helped to supervise some of the work on the roof trusses.

In his autobiography, Wright shared a story of how the workers, frustrated with the steel clips that were supposed to connect the trusses, deserted the scene and left the materials hanging loosely from the top of the building. He climbed the icy scaffolding in the dead of winter — “nothing between [me] and the ground but that forest of open steel beams” — and retrieved the clips.

It seems that Wright also contributed to the campus’s first boiler house, a central heating plant that later became Radio Hall, as drawings of the trusses matched some of his later work.

“It was with Professor Conover that [I] really learned most,” Wright shared in the rare warm reflection of his time at the UW.

In early 1887, Wright left Madison to start his career in Chicago. He wouldn’t return to the UW campus, at least in a formal capacity, for more than four decades.

### 3 Later in his career, Wright became a frequent visitor on campus — and a critic of UW architecture.

In the early part of his career, Wright surely felt spurned by the university, which routinely passed him over on commissions. And the university likely feared reputational harm by association, with controversies always swirling around Wright's romantic and financial affairs.

But by 1930 — his reputation growing first in Europe and Southeast Asia and finally in the U.S. — Frank Lloyd Wright's name was too big to ignore. His achievements started to appear in seemingly every issue of the UW's alumni magazine. A glowing profile from 1949 began with the line: "The most noteworthy quality about Frank Lloyd Wright is the deep human warmth that issues from him."

Wright was first invited to speak on campus in October 1930. More than 1,000 people crowded Music Hall for his pair of lectures, titled "The New Architecture" and "Salvation by Imagination." Walter Agard, a UW classics professor, introduced Wright as "perhaps the greatest architect in the world."

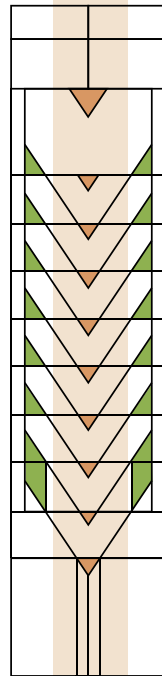
"To those who love architecture, 'radical' should be a beautiful word," Wright told the crowd. "It is not enough for architecture to take up where others left off."

He added: "We are a self-conscious nation, and we are afraid to create."

Wright returned to the UW for similarly high-minded speeches at least five times between 1932 and 1955, typically in the Memorial Union Theater and coinciding with exhibitions of his work. He preached from his gospel of organic architecture, which sought to bring people and buildings into harmony with their natural surroundings.

A proud provocateur, Wright never shied from the chance to criticize his host. In 1932, he mocked the Memorial Union's architecture as "speaking Italian, extremely bad Italian." In 1948, he added that "all the buildings that the university has built are heresy," calling them "dead forms" and "monarchic hangovers unbecoming to a democracy."

In another lecture, he decried the shoreline buildings for being designed with their backs to the water. Wright believed that the university wasted a "gift of nature" by failing to marry its campus to Lake Mendota.



### 4 During Wright's campus visits, he inspired one famous writer and feuded with another.

Wright's antiestablishment message resonated with at least one UW student and fellow visionary. Lorraine Hansberry x'52, the future playwright and author of *A Raisin in the Sun*, wrote that one of Wright's campus lectures left an indelible mark.

"He attacked almost everything ... [including] the nature of education saying that we put in so many fine plums and get out so many fine prunes," she noted. "Everyone laughed — the faculty nervously I guess; but the students cheered."

Later, with Wright's critiques still ringing in her ears, Hansberry left the UW to "pursue an education of another kind" — a writing career in New York City.

In 1934, Wright rubbed shoulders with another famous writer on campus. Gertrude Stein, the rare figure who could match Wright's eccentricity and ego, visited Memorial Union to deliver a guest lecture in which, according to one reporter, she "modestly offered her work as the foundation of modern English literature."

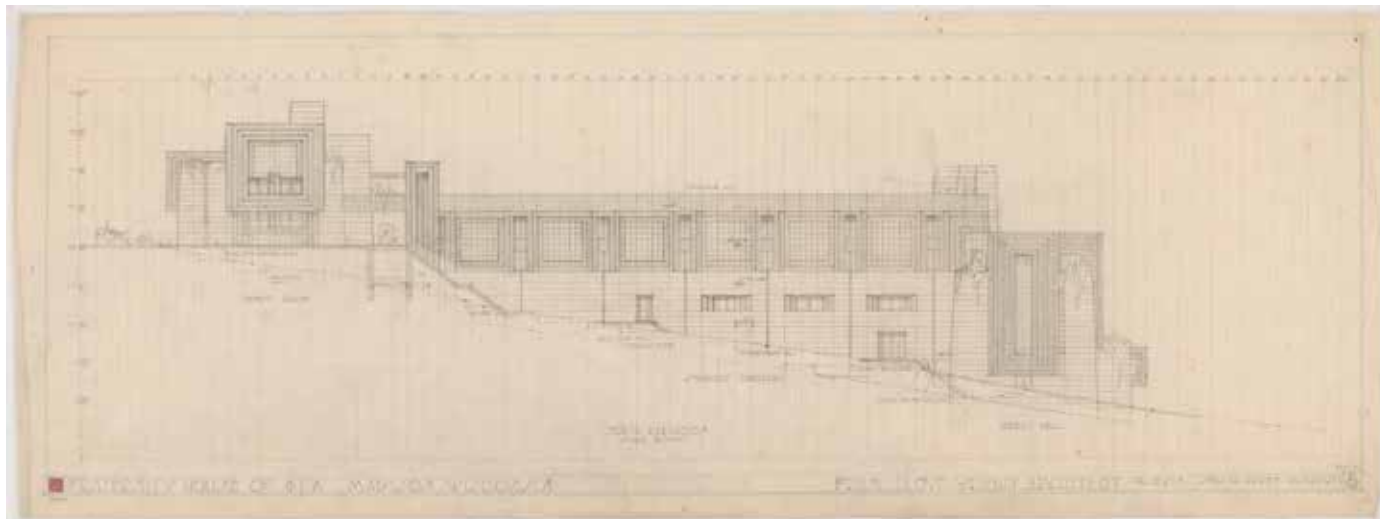
Afterward, Stein retreated to a party room and recognized an approaching figure in the hallway — the man who, according to the alumni magazine, "had sat in the front row during her lecture [and] slept like the dead." Stein ordered an attendant to "slam the door quickly and solidly in the astounded face of Frank Lloyd Wright."

A week later, Wright fired back with a satirical column in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, mocking Stein's "simple view of world literature" and insisting on the last word in the bizarre feud.

### 5 Wright designed two university-related buildings, but neither came to fruition.

Wright was commissioned for more than 30 building designs in Madison, the most of any place in the world. But only two of them — a boathouse for the rowing team and a fraternity house for Phi Gamma Delta — had a direct connection to the university.

In 1905, UW rower Cudworth Beye 1906 asked Wright to design a second boathouse for the crew team along Lake Mendota. The architect responded eagerly: "We are always ready when 'Alma Mater' calls — we will design any thing for the [UW] from a chicken house to a cathedral, no matter how busy we may be."



Just over a month later, Wright sent the sketches and predicted a “somewhat more expensive” project than anticipated. The ground floor, flanked on each side by floating piers, was to house the rowing shells, with a locker room on the level above. Wright’s plans were a confident expression of his budding Prairie style: symmetrical, horizontal, low proportioned, always in unity with its surroundings. It was his first design to incorporate a perfectly flat roof and was among the most abstract of his early work.

There was just one obstacle: UW administrators were never really on board with the plan, and they were far more preoccupied with the football program (which the faculty was trying to suspend over safety concerns). Within months, it became clear that funding for the boathouse would not materialize.

Wright was still clearly proud of the work: it was the only unbuilt design featured in his prominent *Wasmuth Portfolio* five years later. And in 2007, the UW boathouse design was finally constructed — in Buffalo, New York, under the guidance of a former Wright apprentice.

In 1924, alumni of the UW’s Phi Gamma Delta chapter commissioned Wright to build a new fraternity house at 16 Langdon Street. Wright’s plans separated essential functions into a student wing, great hall, and alumni guest house. The Mayan-inspired exterior followed the narrow, sloping lot, hugging the hillside all the way down, complete with rooftop terraces.

The alumni eventually lost confidence in Wright after a series of personal dramas and rising construction estimates. They discharged the architect and turned the project over to the architectural firm Law, Law, and Potter, which preserved Wright’s three-part floor plan but abandoned much else in its more conventional design.

Even after his death in 1959, Wright’s imprint on campus proved almost cruelly elusive. In May 1965, the State Building Commission approved a resolution to name a proposed student union at the UW in

*Wright designed a Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house before the alumni lost confidence in him.*

honor of the late architect. But the “Wright Union” was never to be — Union South, sans eponym or even mention of Wright, opened in 1971.

At least you can see Wright’s influence in the new Union South, which was rebuilt in 2011 in the architect’s Prairie style.

## 6 Wright lobbied the UW to sponsor his Taliesin Fellowship.

In 1928, Wright announced that he was planning to convert the old Hillside School in Spring Green into an “academy of allied arts” with an architectural focus. He reached out to the UW in hopes it would fund and sponsor what would later become the Taliesin Fellowship — his famous apprenticeship program.

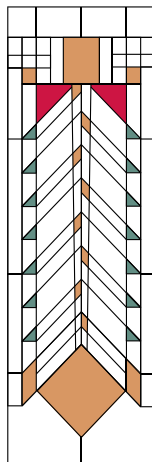
Wright was likely inspired by the UW’s Experimental College, a two-year alternative program established by educational reformer Alexander Meiklejohn in 1927. It attracted fellow free spirits, and Wright often sung the experiment’s praises.

Wright negotiated with the university for a year, but administrators ultimately rejected a school located so far off campus. The architect lashed out at UW president Glenn Frank, accusing him of letting Wright’s “domestic situation” (filled with multiple marriages, divorces, mistresses, and custody battles) influence the decision.

Wright opened the Taliesin Fellowship on his own in 1932.

The ordeal soured him even more on traditional education. While the university merely conditioned its students, he argued, the Taliesin Fellowship enlightened them.

Wright explained in the UW’s alumni magazine: “No courses, no credits, no examinations, no teaching. ... Our textbook is the one book of creation itself.”



## 7 Wright earned an honorary doctorate from the UW in 1955 — and tried to receive another degree.

Wright wrote in his 1932 autobiography that he left the UW early because he felt little motivation “just to be one of the countless many who had that certificate.” But that sentiment did not hold true in his later years.

After decades of debate and rejection by the UW’s Committee on Honorary Degrees, Wright was nominated for an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts during an all-faculty meeting in March 1955.

Wright, soon to turn 87, eagerly accepted the recognition in a letter to UW president E. B. Fred. A week later, he wrote to Fred again, adding a request that he receive his undergraduate degree and turning in what he claimed to be a senior thesis.

“So here is the missing thesis — *The Eternal Law* — to be back-filed, perhaps, with those of my ancient class?” he wrote.

It contained a dozen typed pages (with penciled edits), many personal views, and zero citations. He argued, with familiar grandiosity, that the only certainty in life is change — “that we are all in a state of becoming, that is to say, of growth, or decay: decay being but another form of growth.”

Fred responded diplomatically: “The honor which we contemplate doing you ... so far eclipses the deserts of an ordinary student ... that I must protest against your feeling that any ‘repair’ needs be made.” He promised to preserve Wright’s paper in the archives.

Wright handled the rebuff with grace, writing back, “Since it has found a resting place, all is well.”

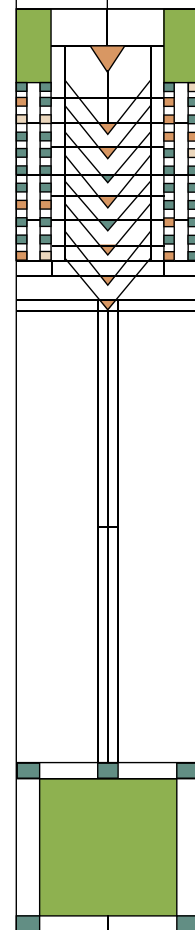
On June 17, 1955, Wright attended the UW’s commencement ceremony at Camp Randall and walked across the stage to receive his honorary degree “with an ailing back (but also a smile),” according to the alumni magazine.

The citation for Wright’s honorary degree referred to him as a “constructive controversialist.” In conferring the degree, Fred told Wright: “You have labored long and well to release the spirits of men from the shackles of outworn convention.”

It’s clear that the recognition from his alma mater touched the old architect deeply. In his response to the UW’s initial invitation, you can practically hear the sigh of relief in his words.

“No honors are sweeter than home-honors. While the lateness of the hour was becoming a matter for invidious speculation — that is now happily ended.” ●

*Preston Schmitt '14 is a senior staff writer for On Wisconsin.*



UW ARCHIVES

*Wright receives an honorary degree for his work as a “constructive controversialist.”*



*Burden never knows what questions might be asked when he picks up his phone. And he thrives on that.*



# THE UW'S Political Sage

*In partisan times, Barry Burden is the source for factual election information.*

**BY MELANIE CONKLIN MA'93  
PHOTOS BY ALTHEA DOTZOUR**

UW political science professor Barry Burden sits in the local Madison Club, ready to lecture on the rhetoric of political conventions to a bipartisan group of insiders. But moderator Jeff Mayers MS'89 of the news service WisPolitics tosses Burden a curveball, jettisoning the announced topic in favor of breaking news on the guilty verdict in the federal gun trial of presidential son Hunter Biden.



*“Burden is tackling the big questions, but he’s doing it from the perspective of a social science researcher, as opposed to an advocate who has a point of view.”*

Burden is unperturbed, calmly awaiting the new line of inquiry with an attentive gaze. Refocusing on hot political news du jour is his stock-in-trade. The first question is on a court case decided the prior day. Later, a guest asks about a *New York Times* article in that morning’s paper. Burden responds authoritatively every time. Is it possible to trip this guy up?

Burden is a world-renowned expert in American electoral politics, a popular UW–Madison professor, and a frequent media source due to his unimpeachably nonpartisan, factual approach. “He’s tackling the big questions, but he’s doing it from the perspective of a social science researcher, as opposed to an advocate who has a point of view,” says Susan Webb Yackee, director of the UW La Follette School of Public Affairs. “And in our very purple state, Barry’s approach to scholarship is noteworthy.”

Burden is one of the top scholars in campaigns and elections, according to Charles Stewart III, Massachusetts Institute of Technology political science professor and Burden’s coeditor on *The Measure of American Elections*. “Anything he writes becomes an instant must-read in the field.”

Burden enjoys the unexpected. In this election year of extreme political upheaval, his wealth of knowledge is more sought after than ever. Whether talking to election observers from Japan or journalists from Argentina, Sweden, or Singapore, he never knows what questions might be asked when he picks up his phone. And he thrives on that.

“Being a political science professor, I think,

is different from any other discipline on campus because it is moving constantly,” says Burden. “There might be developments that morning before I’ve had breakfast, or in the hour before I walked into the classroom, that other people are aware of that I am not. So it has a different pace than music or math or astronomy or even related fields like sociology and psychology.”

The Madison Club presentation runs overtime due to the unusually “enthusiastic, engaged audience,” according to Mayers. Among the first to leave the room is an apologetic Burden — a Milwaukee TV station is outside waiting to interview him. Welcome to his life.

## Beasts of Burden

Three graduate students casually pull up chairs around an aged wooden table on the second floor of North Hall, just above Burden’s office. Clutching a paper coffee cup, he convenes the biweekly meeting of the Beasts of Burden — a group of his doctoral advisees. The conversation flows from data sets to



*Burden (second from left) with his graduate students: “Being a political science professor is different from any other discipline on campus because it is moving constantly.”*

research scope, and he wraps up, as is customary, by asking, “What media have you been consuming?” Someone mentions an episode of the game show *Game Changer* where contestants get blamed for messing up despite never being told the rules. Burden jokes: “Is this a metaphor for how professors interact with students?”

There’s a new twist at this particular meeting. The students summarily dismiss their adviser from the room so they can talk about Burden behind his back.

“He was the whole reason I came to the UW,” attests Jess Esplin MA’23, PhDx’26. She wanted to study election reform, so she reached out to experts nationwide. Burden responded with a timely email — something she now knows is his standard procedure.

“He makes an effort to make himself available,” she says. “He’s one of the only academics who can keep up on their emails.”

Burden is careful with his word choices, has high expectations, and forces students to also be clear and concise, notes Matthew Kim ’22, PhDx’25. He credits Burden with drawing in students and encouraging participation. “You never feel on the sidelines.”

Jacqueline Qiu PhDx’28 felt comfortable breaking down in tears in his office when struggling with health and academic challenges. Burden handed her a tissue and listened. “He’s really empathetic, considerate, and an excellent teacher with clear

expectations — the best I’ve had,” she says. “His classes have always been my favorite, although they’re also the hardest.”

Esplin lifts her phone to show a picture from a class where students dressed up in “standard Barry uniform” — some variety of a blue plaid button-down shirt with jeans. They dub him a nerd, a dad figure, a *Star Wars* fan, and a lover of the black cat on his phone’s home screen. Several times a year, his grad students are invited to a gathering at his house, where his persona remains the same: Always considerate. Always empathetic. And always the professor.

During the years Levi Bankston MA’18, PhD’23 spent at UW–Madison, Burden was his boss at the Elections Research Center, as well as his adviser and mentor. He jokes that Burden has a robot-like ability to retain facts in spite of his busy schedule.

“If it weren’t for good professors, empathetic professors, like Barry Burden,” Bankston says, “I probably would have quit the program.”

Burden is so serious about his role as a professor, according to his wife, Laura Burden, that he never cancels his classes — even right after she had a baby.

Yet when Burden began college, he viewed politics as a hobby and couldn’t conceive of *professor* as a job option.

## Zero Politics

When Burden, now 53, arrived at Ohio’s Wittenberg University, he didn’t understand what a syllabus or

midterms were. He was a first-generation college student and felt at a disadvantage.

Burden grew up in Newark, Ohio, where his mother worked in a civilian support role in the Air Force and his father ran a machine and welding shop. In the Burden home, politics was absent.

“There was zero politics in my school environment, zero politics in my home environment,” recalls Burden. “I don’t know who my parents voted for, or if they even voted, which I think is part of what made it interesting to me. I felt like it was something going on in the world that I was being denied access to. So I was curious.”

He adds: “My career has been made in a place that none of my family knows much about.”

The television was on in his home, however, and there were only a handful of stations, so Tom Brokaw on *NBC Nightly News* was a backdrop to family evenings. When he was a senior in high school in 1988, his class did a mock debate where Burden played Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis. He demurs when asked if he won the debate: “I think I had done more homework than anyone else in terms of preparing.”

At Wittenberg, he tutored and majored in math, but it lacked the element of surprise that inspires him. So he rushed through a political science major in his junior and senior years, preparing for a career in campaign consulting, polling, or a similar field.

The more Burden saw of politics, the sillier it appeared to him. For example, he recalls President Bill Clinton’s expectation that his administration could reform the U.S. health care system top to bottom in his first six months in office. “You people are bananas,” thought Burden. “You’re trying to upend a huge part of the economy. Good luck with that.”

Several supportive mentors redirected him onto the path of becoming a political science professor, and he earned his doctorate at Ohio State University.

Today, Burden is the only professor who sits on the First-Generation Badgers working group, offering support and networking for the 20 percent of UW–Madison students who are the first in their families to attend college. “I think the task force believed that having a faculty member as a member was a nice sign for students that you can go from being a high school graduate like everyone else in the family to being a college professor,” he says. “That path is open to you.”

Burden got his first job as a professor at Louisiana State University, then moved to Harvard University. Harvard had the draw of new experiences, from being on an Ivy League campus to taking the subway to accessing the top politicians and scholars who regularly visited campus.

But after seven years at Harvard, he was looking for a place to settle down with his wife and two children where he could build a lifelong career.

UW–Madison had a reputation for its prominent scholars in American government.

“I knew it had a great graduate program,” he says, “and I knew about Madison’s reputation as a place to live.”

That was 2006. Since then, his work in political science has taken him places he never expected.

## Lights, Camera, Action

A young Burden would have been shocked to learn that his career would land him in documentaries like *Fahrenheit 11/9* and *An Unreasonable Man*, with his own IMDB entry. Attorneys also seek him out as an expert witness on elections law. He’s selective about the requests he accepts, just as he is with media requests.

“I can be picky about the things I want to do,” he says. “What’s going to be interesting or rewarding? Or where can I have a real impact on the law?”

Burden has testified in battles over voter ID, ballot drop boxes, and election results, which are increasingly waged in the courts.

MIT’s Stewart has been on the same and opposing sides of Burden in court and has found him to be unflappable. “He is very calm, very assured, very easygoing,” says Stewart. “He is an easy witness to listen to.”

Burden says that being an expert witness is different from being a teacher or researcher. “You can’t be equivocal, and you can’t be complicated or ambiguous.”

Burden has to sign his written reports under penalty of perjury, followed by taking the witness stand under oath and being cross-examined by attorneys looking to trip him up with any past tweet or syllabus or quote. He’s testified in a half-dozen states, maintaining his disciplined adherence to statistics and facts in high-stakes situations.

Indeed, Burden isn’t fazed by much of anything, whether aggressive legislators or media. “You might think that would make someone in my role be more cautious about things they say, getting in trouble or offending one side, but I don’t think I’ve been very cautious, and it has not gotten me in trouble,” he says. “If your analysis is based on facts and proper social science standards, it’s pretty difficult for people to argue.”

*In this year of extreme political upheaval, Burden’s wealth of knowledge is more sought after than ever.*

## Too Much News

The 2024 election season offered scholars plenty of riveting material. As President Joe Biden withdrew from the race, Burden took to X to succinctly explain the situation to his nearly 6,000 followers.

“It’s unlike any other presidential election in our lifetimes,” he says. “There are so many elements that are one-off and strange compared to the historical record of how elections usually work.”

The pinned post on Burden’s X profile from 2020 reads: “There is too much news.”

Election season has become 24/7, no longer taking a break in off-cycle years or summer or even holidays, notes Burden. And recent events, such as the violence on January 6, 2021, once “seemed out of the realm of possibility.”

Fear is heightened, but Burden offers reassurance that many elements remain consistent.

“I tell my students this: every election is different, but also every election is the same. We know Oklahoma is going to vote for the Republican candidate — doesn’t matter who the nominee is or anything else. So there are those kinds of stable, repeatable things that are known in advance.”

While Burden can confidently answer any reporter’s query about elections, one question does trip him up.

## Go, Go, Go

When asked about his hobbies, there is a long pause. “I’m a runner.”

He hesitates, thinks some more.

“Not a lot of other hobbies that I’m super invested in. I play golf a little bit. We’ve had a poker group on and off over the years.”

Burden’s family is also active in the Unitarian church in Madison. That’s another thing, he realizes, that was not a part of his childhood.

“Just as I felt like politics was being withheld from me, religion might be the same way. We were not churchgoers, no talk of that, never inside a church building. I didn’t know what happened in those places. And so it generated a kind of curiosity on my part.”

Laura Burden, a social worker and his wife of more than 30 years, says her “go, go, go” husband needs more hobby time. The family did take a summer vacation, during which he struggled to build a fire.

“By the last night, he realized exactly what he needed to do,” she says. “It’s Barry to his core: he’s gonna approach things very logically, march through, figure it out — and he’s gonna get it right. And then you’re gonna have a fire.” ●

*Melanie Conklin MA’93 is a Wisconsin journalist and political communications director.*

## Election Facts and Fallacies

**Barry Burden fields a lot of election questions, whether from the *New York Times* or patients in his dentist’s waiting room. Here’s a sampling of the wisdom he regularly dispenses.**

🗳️ The United States is unlike any other democracy on the planet in its elections. Campaigns are months longer, fundraising is far greater, and no other country has the series of primaries and caucuses to pick presidential nominees.

🗳️ The two-party-dominated system and the Electoral College are also unique aspects of U.S. politics.

🗳️ Presidential tickets don’t fare better in the home states of vice president picks or the states where the parties hold their conventions.

🗳️ Studies show that Democrats aren’t advantaged by higher rates of voting by mail.

🗳️ In recent years, older voters have leaned Republican, while younger voters leaned heavily Democratic. Yet as recently as 2000, voting patterns were similar across age groups.

🗳️ Voter turnout varies mainly across states rather than by election. For generations, national turnout in a presidential election has not varied by more than 15 points. But in 2020, the gap between the state with the lowest voting rate (Mississippi) and the one with the highest (Oregon) was twice that number.

— M.C.





# Unfiltered

*On social media and in her product lines, founder, author, and body-acceptance advocate Katie Sturino '03 is redefining beauty norms.*

**BY HAYDEN LAMPHERE**

## **Katie Sturino '03 has a leg up.**

Whether she's in parking lots, airports, stores, or even in the middle of Times Square, she will confidently prop up her leg and apply her award-winning anti-chafe stick, Thigh Rescue. This bold ritual isn't merely a marketing tactic for her body-positive beauty brand, Megababe; it reflects Sturino's approach to life.

As an influencer, entrepreneur, and body-acceptance advocate, Sturino has leveraged her social media platform to challenge body-shaming, promote confidence, and build a supportive community. With her personal brand firmly rooted in embracing people of every size, she launched her company to foster shame-free attitudes toward bodies.

For Sturino, authenticity is more than a motto — it's her guiding principle: "I don't know how to do anything different than show up as me," she says.

*Sturino embraces plus-size fashion and rejects the notion that women won't be happy until they change their weight.*

## Sturino Meets World

Sturino's first foray into social-media success came in 2014, with a viral Instagram post about her rescue dog Toast, an adorable Cavalier King Charles spaniel whose tongue always hung out of her mouth. At the time, Instagram, while still primarily a photo-sharing app, was on the cusp of its influencer revolution.

After studying rhetoric at UW-Madison, Sturino moved to New York to dive into fashion and PR, including founding her own agency, Tinder PR (no, not that Tinder). That experience led her to turn what could've been a flash-in-the-pan moment into a career for Toast that included book deals, modeling gigs, and branded @toastmeetsworld merchandise. Though Toast died in 2017, her social media presence lives on through siblings Muppet, Cheese, and Crumb on their account @dogmeetsworld.

Toast's success showed Sturino the power of social media and led her to begin using it for herself. She launched her personal Instagram page, @katiesturino, and plus-size fashion blog, *The L2ish Style*, in 2015. Initially focused on shopping advice for women size 12 and above, Sturino's blog gained recognition for her candid posts about overcoming her lifelong struggles with body image and offering tips for how other women can do the same.

"I find that, anytime I'm going through something, whether it's an anxiety attack or not being able to find something in a store, I share it, and inevitably, there are people out there who feel better because I did," she says.

She also introduced content series like "Can I Shop in Store?" #MakeMySize, and #SuperSizetheLook, where she recommends places to shop, tries on clothes from brands lacking size inclusivity, and encourages women to wear what they like at any size by re-creating celebrities' outfits on a plus-size body.

Sturino's journey on social media has had its challenges. "It was a difficult transition because I had never had my face out there before," she says. "But I felt that I had an important message that needed to get out there, so I pushed through my discomfort and awkwardness, and after about a year, I landed on my feet with it."

Indeed, she did. @katiesturino now has more than 800,000 followers on Instagram.

## To the Thigh Rescue

Every spring, Sturino would sit down with her growing community to ask a very serious question: how are we handling thigh chafe? This annual conversation about "chafe season," as she dubbed it, was just one example of Sturino's willingness to speak candidly about issues often overlooked by mainstream beauty brands.

"I talk to my people all the time about all the taboo things people don't talk about, like thigh chafe and boob sweat," she shares. Through these



JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF KATIE STURINO



JOSE PEREZ/BAUER-GRIFFIN VIA GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF KATIE STURINO



conversations, Sturino identified a gap in the market for products that addressed these common issues without embarrassing names or toxic ingredients.

“I just couldn’t wait anymore for the beauty industry to catch up,” she says. In 2017, drawing from her personal experiences and the feedback of her loyal following, Sturino, alongside her sister Jenny Sturino ’00 and friend Kate McPherson ’03, took a leap and self-funded Megababe. Their mission: to create “nontoxic, solution-oriented products to enhance comfort and confidence in people’s bodies.”

Megababe’s journey began with a focus on tackling the dreaded thigh chafe. Despite initial skepticism from manufacturers unfamiliar with the concept, Sturino persisted.

“I knew from talking to my community that this isn’t just a problem for me,” she explains. “So many people have it because we talked about it all the time.” Undeterred, the trio forged ahead by any means necessary, even running operations from the Sturino family’s garage in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, for the first two years.

In 2017, Megababe launched its first two products — Thigh Rescue and Bust Dust, a talc-free powder for perspiration. Both sold out within weeks, and Thigh Rescue continues to be the brand’s bestselling product, with more than one million units sold.

For Sturino, trusting her instincts and those of her followers proved to be the right decision. “I can’t tell you how many people did not think this was a good idea,” she says. “But there was also just so much positivity that came with the launch of this brand.”

In the seven years since, Megababe has shown no signs of slowing down. The company has grown its product offerings from the original two to more than 30, including Megaman, a line for men. It has secured placement in major retailers like Target, Ulta, and Walmart; expanded internationally into Boots, the UK’s largest pharmacy chain; and this year produced its first ad campaign, Megababe vs. The Chafe, starring plus-size model Hunter McGrady. These achievements not only mark business milestones but also reflect success in Sturino’s larger goal to redefine beauty norms and empower people to embrace their true selves.

“My gut was correct,” says Sturino. “It felt really good then, and it feels really good every day, still.”

## Body Talk

In May 2024, Sturino found herself in a dreamlike position — seated next to Oprah Winfrey.

Weeks earlier, Sturino made an Instagram post that included criticism of WeightWatchers for decades of harmful weight loss rhetoric and contributing to a culture that “shamed people for simply existing in larger bodies.”

Her post sparked a flood of responses from women sharing similar experiences with dieting and weight-loss culture. It also captured the attention of

*On her social media accounts, Sturino re-creates celebrity looks in plus sizes, including outfits worn by actresses Meryl Streep (left, top) and Hilary Duff (bottom).*

Sima Sistani, CEO of WeightWatchers, who reached out with a personal apology and an invitation to appear on Oprah’s special, *Making the Shift: A New Way to Think about Weight*.

“I didn’t know I needed to hear that apology,” Sturino shared in a follow-up post. “I didn’t know it would mean so much. And based on the hundreds of DMs I got, neither did you.”

On the special, Sturino championed her message of body acceptance, encouraging compassion and rejecting the notion that people won’t be happy until they change their weight. Her commitment to challenging societal norms and fostering self-love is evident through her Instagram page, her podcast *Boob Sweat*, and her 2021 illustrated workbook, *Body Talk: How to Embrace Your Body and Start Living Your Best Life*. By addressing issues like size inclusivity, negative self-perception, and medical biases, Sturino resonates with a community of women navigating their own body-image challenges.

**“What made me want to do this work wasn’t just marketing dresses; it was about connecting with people and helping them along their body-acceptance journey.”**

“Connecting with people has become the fuel for my fire,” she says. “I never thought anyone would be coming to me for anything other than jeans advice. But what made me want to do this work wasn’t just marketing dresses; it was about connecting with people and helping them along their body-acceptance journey.”

This passion permeates every aspect of Sturino’s life, especially her work with Megababe. Despite its success, the company has remained true to its roots. It is still self-funded, with products made in the United States (though no longer shipped from home by Sturino’s parents), and Sturino continues to personally engage with her followers on social media to meet their needs. “When our customers tell us they want something, I listen and look into it,” she explains.

Sturino’s mission extends beyond beauty products; it’s about reshaping attitudes toward body positivity. “For the most part, women of all sizes are dissatisfied with their bodies,” she says. “I am here to try to curb and stop that. The more we can shake it, the better off future generations will be.”

With her unwavering commitment to authenticity and empathy, Sturino is set to challenge beauty standards for years to come. And if that rubs anyone the wrong way, Sturino has just the thing. ●



Sturino’s antichafing stick is Megababe’s best-selling product.

*Hayden Lamphere is a writer for the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association who’s also dreamed of meeting Oprah.*




# *Unsealing Ancient Mysteries*

*Brent Seales MS'88, PhD'91 may rewrite history. Thanks to his technology, scholars can read charred scrolls buried for 2,000 years by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.*

**BY GEORGE SPENCER**

*Scrolls from the only intact ancient library ever found may now reveal new insights into the world circa 79 AD.*

 Odysseus overcame many obstacles during his 10-year voyage home. The hero of Homer's ancient epic *The Odyssey* might have a modern-day counterpart — computer scientist Brent Seales MS'88, PhD'91.

A professor at the University of Kentucky–Lexington, Seales has made it his life's work to accomplish a seemingly impossible task — to “virtually unwrap” hundreds, possibly thousands, of priceless scrolls that were buried and carbonized when Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD 79.

Sixty feet of superheated gas and rock smothered the coastal Roman resort town of Herculaneum in the Bay of Naples. Author Pliny the Younger fled the cataclysm and described it this way: “A dense black cloud was coming up behind us, spreading over the earth like a flood. ... Many besought the aid of the gods, but still more imagined there were no gods left, and that the universe was plunged into eternal darkness for evermore.”

Julius Caesar's father-in-law, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, was likely the original owner of a three-story villa there. Statesmen like Piso often had libraries that contained as many as 40,000 scrolls.

Diggers discovered about 800 of those papyri, now known as the Herculaneum scrolls, in 1752. They look like charred, shrunken, burned pastries. At first scientists tried to unroll the brittle relics, a futile effort that caused many to crumble. “Turn'd to a sort of charcoal, so brittle, that, being touched, it falls readily into ashes,” wrote one early examiner.

Scholars hope Piso's library, the only intact ancient library ever found, may contain lost treasures — plays by Aeschylus and Euripides, poems by Sappho, histories of Rome by Livy, and possibly works that document Christianity's earliest years.

By all accounts, this find ranks with the Dead Sea Scrolls as one of the greatest discoveries in the history of archaeology. And Seales has led the way to tease out its mysteries.

## Helpers on the Journey

Homer dubbed Odysseus a “man skilled in all ways of contending,” a description that fits Seales. He, too, has overcome daunting troubles. Technological riddles in the fields of AI and x-ray tomography stymied him. Museums denied him access to materials. In one case, his scholarly collaborators claimed success without mentioning him.

Through his resourcefulness, patience, and collaborative spirit, Seales won powerful allies — among them, Silicon Valley entrepreneur Nat Friedman. It was Friedman's idea to start the crowd-sourced Vesuvius Challenge, an international competition that awards prizes to teams who succeed in reading the Herculaneum papyri. In early 2024, a winning team revealed five percent of a scroll written by Piso's resident scholar Philodemus, a follower of philosopher Epicurus.

Seales believes that in a year or two, he and his team will overcome remaining hurdles and enable classicists to read all the scrolls. The ultimate goal? Exhume and decipher thousands of still-buried papyri.

When his odyssey began 30 years ago, no one was working on this. “No one else cared. People thought it was impossible,” he recalls. “I didn't feel like an underdog. I just felt like a true pioneer. It was real exploration.”

## The Road to Wisconsin

Seales speaks from the heart. A balding bear of a man with bushy black eyebrows, he has sparkling eyes, an infectious low-key confidence, and an easy way with words.

He grew up in the 1970s and '80s, when personal computing was just beginning to take off. Raised in a modest household in the village of Springville in western New York, he caught tech fever at a young age. “For me, computing represented the paramount American experience where you have upward mobility. You could have pioneering exploration. You could have everything the New World is about,” he says.

A lover of math and music, he played violin at his church. The University of Louisiana–Lafayette gave him a double scholarship to study computer science and music.

For graduate school, Seales says, “I shot for the moon. I couldn't imagine anything better than to be at Wisconsin.” Strapped for money when he applied to the university, he prayed it would “just let me work and pay my own way.” Unlike other schools, the UW gave him a four-year guarantee of funding.

At UW–Madison, Charles Dyer, professor emeritus of computer sciences and biostatistics and medical informatics, was Seales's doctoral thesis adviser. It was an ideal match. Both men were young. Dyer was only 10 years older than Seales. Both craved long-distance ordeals. Dyer ran marathons. Seales thrived in Madison's cycling culture and pedaled in weekend races.

Even then, artificial intelligence's potential fascinated Seales. Dyer was one of the first scientists to study computer vision, an AI-related field that gripped Seales's imagination. Under Dyer, he wrote algorithms that transformed two-dimensional photos into 3-D images, a technique Mars Rovers would use to traverse the Red Planet without commands from Earth.

“I give Brent a huge credit for sticking with his research and making steady progress for years without a lot of big reinforcement,” says Dyer.

## Perfecting X-Ray Vision

How does Seales get scrolls that look like flame-broiled croissants to surrender nearly 2,000-year-old secrets?

First, using a technology similar to that used by



UK PHOTO

a computed tomography (CT) scanner, he takes a 3-D scan of a scroll. Its beam slices the scroll into about 15,000 vertical images. Each unimaginably thin slice is like a tree ring. It reveals how heat and pressure distorted the scroll's overlapping wraps.

Then he virtually flattens the scroll. So far, this has required researchers to trace distorted rings, a process Seales hopes will soon be automated. Correct tracing of rings lets his software create an accurate 3-D image that is flattened to two-dimensions.

Finally, because the Romans used an ink that scans cannot capture, Seales employs machine learning to detect nearly invisible texture differences in blackened papyrus, thus making letters visible.

His saga of discovery has been as convoluted as one of his scrolls. It began in London's British Museum in 1995 with a digital imaging project to improve readability of the earliest copy of *Beowulf*. Seales used a NASA technique called MSI, multi-spectral imaging, to make letters pop out against their background. This happens because iron-based ink reflects light, especially ultraviolet light,

*Seales says that scholars should soon be able to read all 800 of the Herculaneum scrolls that have been unearthed so far. But the ultimate goal is to exhume and decipher thousands more papyri from a library that ranks along with the Dead Sea Scrolls as one of the greatest finds in the history of archaeology.*

differently than a background of parchment, vellum, or papyrus.

Based on that work, he wrote a paper about digital restoration. The result? "No one cared," Seales says. "But I still look at it as one of those turning-point papers for me, because I articulated the principles around digital restoration that were going to be amazing. In that paper, I wrote that the pinnacle of the restoration would be complete virtual unwrapping."

Seales had a brainstorm. He had seen enough wizened documents to know the forces of time and temperature often caused pages to grow wavy. Sometimes the distortions were so bad they hid letters.

He was working on a ninth-century vellum copy of *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius. Voilà — Seales performed a virtual flattening. His smoothing of the manuscript made letters reveal themselves for the first time in centuries.

### The Odyssey Takes a Detour

Seales learned about the Herculaneum scrolls when classicist Richard Janko at the University of Michigan contacted him in 2004. He told Seales about their horrible condition, that others had destroyed some, and asked if he could make them readable.

"I knew instantly — instantly — that if it could be solved, it would be amazing, and the world would think it was amazing," says Seales. With some difficulty, he got funding to proceed.

To move forward, Seales needed his own CT scanner, one that was portable. He and a partner at Iowa State University tried but failed to build one he could bring to the field to collect his own data. So Seales decided to partner with the Belgian company SkyScan to use this cutting-edge technology.

In 2005 at Oxford, he gave a talk to the Friends of Herculaneum Society. He told them that since the late 1970s, Egyptologists had put mummies in CT scanners. Since scrolls were also wrapped, surely they could be unspooled. All he and his students had to do was write software to interpret the machine's data in combination with the imaging technology he had started to use 10 years earlier with *Beowulf*.

To demonstrate his proposal, he made a scroll, lettered it with iron-based ink, and scanned it. The result showed the scroll unrolling with letters visible on its surface.

Next, Seales asked the National Library in Naples, where most of the scrolls are kept, if he could perform similar magic there. "It sent me a response that didn't say, 'No.' It said, 'Hell, no.' But it was in Italian, so it sounded better than that," says Seales.

Undaunted, he successfully approached the Institut de France, which also held scrolls. With a National Science Foundation grant, Seales convinced SkyScan's founder, the Russian physicist Alexander



*O, ye, who patiently explore  
The wreck of Herculean lore,  
What rapture! could ye seize  
Some Theban fragment, or unroll  
One precious, tender-hearted scroll ...*

“But in fact, the scrolls are not tender-hearted scrolls,” he says. “Wordsworth was wrong. They’re hard-hearted scrolls. Hard-hearted.”

For the next few years, progress was slow. Seales found inspiration — and new collaborators — in Paris in 2011 when he was invited to join forces with the Google Cultural Institute. Since renamed Google Arts and Culture, it creates services to boost digital access to the arts.

“We came along at a time when Brent was at a dead end,” says Steve Crossan, who ran the Google project. He felt sure the Kentucky professor would overcome his obstacles. “He was completely tenacious, and he never gave up. It tends to be the case that if you don’t give up, eventually you succeed.”

Both Crossan and Dyer agree that a key to Seales’s success is his collaborative spirit. “He doesn’t require that he owns the whole of the solution,” says Crossan.

“In the research area,” Dyer says, “people are

Sasov, to send his portable CT scanner to the academy in 2009, and he was able to scan two scrolls.

He was coming off a period of “unbridled enthusiasm,” but the results crushed him. The internal complexity of the scrolls “broke” his software. The layers inside the scroll were far from uniform. “They were all tangled and mashed together. My software could not follow them reliably,” he says.

There was another problem. The Romans used carbon-based ink, not ink with an iron base. The letters remained invisible. “I didn’t know what to do. It was a deeply discouraging moment,” he says.

### **Divine Intervention**

In moments of doubt, Seales tried to take comfort from William Wordsworth’s poem *September, 1819*, which reads:

*Top: Seales and his former doctoral student Stephen Parsons examine a Herculean scroll at a science facility in England. Bottom: the carbonized scrolls are so brittle that unwrapping them would reduce them to ashes.*

often very protective of their own work. Not Brent.”

For the next few years, Seales improved the quality of his algorithms so they could conquer the complex convolutions inside scrolls. Then came what some might call divine intervention — Israeli archaeologists asked him to virtually unwrap a carbonized parchment scroll from the ancient town of Ein Gedi. It turned out to be a portion of the Book of Leviticus.

Meanwhile, Seales continued to attack the ink-readability problem. He explored using x-ray phase-contrast tomography, which can reveal minute changes in density in a material. Because of the difficulty of getting permission to use such a machine, he teamed with European scientists who could get the go-ahead.

Disappointment hit again. The scholars he trusted published a paper — without including his name — that claimed they had solved the problem of seeing non-iron-based ink. The media reported the Herculaneum scrolls could now be read. But when Seales studied his ex-colleagues’ data, he realized they were faulty. They had achieved nothing, he says.

Once again, he found himself profoundly discouraged, “because I knew those people. I had worked with them under the assumption we’d all be working together, and they cut me out so they could run forward,” he says.

### **A Triumphant Moment**

Meanwhile, in Israel, Seales’s supercharged algorithms worked. He could virtually unwrap the scroll, and, luckily, scannable metal was in the Biblical ink. The scroll turned out to be one of the oldest copies of the Book of Leviticus and dated from the third or fourth century AD. The subject of the first chapter? Burnt offerings.

With the National Library in Naples continuing to block Seales’s access to its treasure house of scrolls, he won permission from Oxford’s Bodleian Library to scan a Herculaneum fragment known as *P. Herc. 118* for signs of ink. This was not a scroll, but bits of a scroll glued to tissue paper.

The letter *c* could be seen with the naked eye against the papyrus background. The problem was getting the computer to recognize it. “We made the letter appear from the tomography after training the method to recognize the evidence of the ink,” he says. “Building the method to make it visible from the tomography alone was the big breakthrough, because we knew that for full scrolls, we would only have the tomography for the inner layers, not actual photographs.” This was the triumphant moment. Now Seales knew that entire scrolls could be read.

By this time, he had realized that AI and machine learning were “the rocket fuel” that would vastly speed reading of invisible ink. “In 2015 when I did experiments with AI, I realized it was going to be a

game changer,” he says. “It was the key that unlocked everything.”

The man who helped turn the key was Friedman, the former CEO of GitHub, Microsoft’s open-source platform for software developers. During the COVID lockdown in 2020, Friedman had spare time. He became curious about imperial Rome. Soon he was baking Roman-era bread and learning about the Herculaneum scrolls.

“I thought Brent’s project was incredibly cool,” says Friedman. “I wanted to follow along and be a fanboy.”

In 2022 he invited Seales to his hush-hush Frontier Camp, a secretive gathering of techie wizards in the northern California woods. The goal? Win funding for Seales or at least win offers of help.

When the duo struck out, Friedman proposed the Vesuvius Challenge, with first prize going to the scholar who could read four passages of 140 characters. Within months, three college students shared the \$700,000 honors. The 2024 prize dramatically ups the challenge — it goes to a competitor who can decipher 90 percent of four scrolls.

Like Seales, Friedman believes all the scrolls will be readable in short order, once the hand-tracing of wraps inside the scrolls is automated.

### **Hoping for “New Arrivals” in Roman Library**

Seales grew up in what he calls “a very strong and devout Christian tradition.” He wants as much ancient knowledge translated as soon as possible, but his deepest hope is to find early Christian writings.

“My passion is more on religious material from the era, because the first century was the cradle of Christianity, a phenomenal point in human history.

“This villa gives absolutely no indication there would be Christian material there, but, you know, you walk into any library, and you pick a book randomly off the shelf. How do you know what you might get?” he asks.

Seales hopes Piso’s library had a new-readings section. “That’s where the Christian stuff might be, because it was the philosophy of the day,” he says. “It would blow people’s minds. It would challenge us.”

Regardless of what is found, classicist Janko, who serves as a Vesuvius Challenge judge, hopes more scrolls are dug up soon.

“Several times since the eruption in AD 79, this particular spot has been covered with molten lava,” he says. “Vesuvius is quiet for now, but experience teaches that it’s never quiet indefinitely.”

Seales believes that if the race against time to recover all the scrolls is successful, the knowledge contained in the entire collection will constitute the largest discovery from the ancient world to date. ●

*Freelance writer George Spencer is a frequent contributor to On Wisconsin.*







# ***Making Social Media Safe***

*UW researchers are gaining insight into teens' digital behavior and its effect on mental health.*

BY JESSICA  
STEINHOFF '01

ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY CHANELLE  
NIBBELINK



*“Social media isn’t going anywhere, and fearing it won’t change that,” says UW associate professor Alvin Thomas.*

**T**eens’ social media use is intense, and so is the hand-wringing it inspires. A majority use YouTube, TikTok, or both each day, and some do it “almost constantly,” according to a 2023 Pew Research Center study. Meanwhile, headlines sound the alarm about “social media addiction.”

Some health care organizations and news outlets frame overuse this way without unpacking what addiction truly means: an inability to stop doing something despite repeated negative consequences. And the hyperbole does teenagers no favors.

“It robs kids of their agency,” says Megan Moreno, a physician, professor, and interim chair of the pediatrics department at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. “Sometimes we’re telling teens they’re addicted to social media rather than helping them find healthier ways of using it.”

What constitutes “unhealthy” use is an open question in academia, and social media’s upside — its capacity to foster mental health — has barely been studied. Moreno is one UW researcher seeking answers. Her latest project investigates how the social media content teens create and consume influences their beliefs and behavior. It’s funded by an \$8 million grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

This grant also supports projects by UW pediatrics

assistant professor Ellen Selkie MD’08, MPH’09 and Chris Cascio, an associate professor in the UW School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Other UW researchers are exploring the relationship between social media and teen mental health, as well as learning how adults should guide teens’ online experiences. Their findings have the potential to make the much-maligned social platforms a safer place for kids to hang out.

### **“Like Learning to Drive”**

Moreno leads the Social Media and Adolescent Health Research Team, whose approach to digital safety research bridges public health, consumer science, and education. Its youth advisory board lets teens voice their perspectives on the studies.

The three studies funded by the Shriver grant share a cohort of 400 Wisconsin residents ages 13 to 15. Data are being gathered over two years, through surveys, interviews, text-messaged health screenings, and functional magnetic resonance imaging scans. The lab examines the teens’ actions and reactions on TikTok, Instagram, X, and Facebook.

“We observe what they choose to share about their health behaviors on social media, and whether what they share reflects or influences their actual intentions, attitudes, and behaviors,” Moreno says.

Data on how teens discuss healthy behaviors

versus risky ones get linked to brain-imaging data from Cascio's lab. Moreno has found that the teens' posts are largely authentic, providing helpful clues for caregivers.

"I predict a strong positive association between what teens are posting about their behavior and what they're actually doing, which has never been shown in this age group," Moreno says, noting that data analysis is still underway.

As co-medical director of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, Moreno believes that adults, aided by research, can positively affect teens' use of social media

"We need to think about social media like learning to drive," she says. "You don't put a teen in a car and say, 'Figure it out.' You ride with them, see how they're doing, and teach them different parts of the process when they're ready."

### ***Pain and Rewards***

Cascio's Communication, Brain, and Behavior Lab explores how persuasion influences adolescent health behaviors — for example, how teens' real-world choices are shaped by peers' digital actions. For their Shriver-funded study, the researchers are examining brain pathways associated with both the rewards and the social pain teens experience in the digital realm. They're curious why some teen brains are more reactive to social inclusion and exclusion and how these differences influence mental health and behaviors such as vaping.

Though feeling a sense of reward with certain actions is part of the addiction process, it also drives many healthy habits. That's one reason it's unhelpful to generalize about "social media addiction."

"It's like saying alcohol is addictive," Cascio says. "Addiction affects a subset of its users, but it doesn't describe how everyone uses it."

In other words, each teen's social media experience is unique and has a different set of effects. Many teens report positive effects such as improved emotional health and feeling more supported socially. Despite this, other researchers tend to look for links between social media use and negative health outcomes, according to Cascio and Moreno. For the most part, the resulting advice has been to limit screen time — a generalization that leaves many parents feeling lost, guilty, or both.

Moreno argues that optimal amount of screen time will vary from teen to teen. That's why she, Cascio, and Selkie are asking different questions about social media: why are some teens more vulnerable to harm, and what are the best ways to help them?

Cascio's team suspects that the greater a teen's exposure to certain types of social media experiences, the more sensitive to others' opinions they'll be. To test this hypothesis, they are measuring 150 eighth and ninth graders' neural activity as they

view social media posts. The teens see posts they've created and posts by others, rate how much they like or dislike each, and note how certain they feel about their like/dislike ratings.

"We're seeing neural differences at work," Cascio says. "For instance, experiencing more pain with self-posts is related to increased alcohol use. ... It seems to drive health behaviors."

The way the brain processes peer posts matters, too. Preliminary data analysis showed that teens who feel more reward during positive peer feedback are more likely to have used alcohol recently. Those who feel more pain during negative peer feedback have more intentions to vape.

***"Sometimes we're telling teens they're addicted to social media rather than helping them find healthier ways of using it."***

The Communication, Brain, and Behavior Lab is collecting more data to see how these findings play out in different social situations, hoping to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between reactivity and peer feedback. Armed with these findings, adults could offer support tailored to a teen's information-processing style. For instance, a counselor might suggest different resources to teens who are easily influenced by peers' social media behaviors and those who are not.

### ***Social Media Personality Types***

Selkie's Learning More from Adolescents Online group is monitoring teen stress, loneliness, and self-esteem for a Shriver-funded project. The data help test a model in which childhood characteristics predict a trajectory of social media behavior in early adolescence, which then predicts socioemotional well-being indicators in middle adolescence.

The work involves identifying social media "personality types" associated with certain digital behaviors. For example, some types share many more details about their offline lives. Well-being markers get linked to each type.

"We watch how the content of each teen's social media posts evolves over time, and this is enough to determine their type," Selkie says. "Outcomes such as loneliness are likely to differ from one type to another."

Knowing which styles are associated with risk helps mental health professionals develop better interventions.

Selkie's team is also examining the social media



experiences of transgender and nonbinary teens and their parents. The researchers hope to learn how the digital content they consume shapes their families' health care decisions.

"We're wondering what teens learn about gender from influencer content and how it affects their parents' efforts to support their identities," Selkie says.

Studies like these informed a recent White House roundtable where Moreno shared recommendations for making digital life more kid-safe. Selkie's research will influence her clinical work as well.

"When you're in an exam room, you may not see what's impacting a teen's mood," Selkie says. "Research like this provides more context."

### **Cyberbullying**

Selkie began her research career with cyberbullying studies, extending findings by trailblazers like UW educational psychology professor Amy Bellmore. In addition to examining teens' Twitter experiences in the platform's early years, Bellmore pioneered cyberbullying research through a collaboration with UW computer sciences professor Jerry Zhu.

"Jerry Zhu heard about me through a colleague, then asked if I wanted to research cyberbullying with him, which is such a UW-Madison thing to do," Bellmore says of the cross-disciplinary partnership. "I'd been studying bullying — but not cyberbullying — for 10 years and was ready for a new challenge."

Bellmore's team won a \$500,000 National Science Foundation grant to develop machine-learning models that analyze social media data related to bullying. Between 2014 and 2018, they studied more than 500 teens' Twitter posts, plus reports on their social media use and school experiences.

This research also deepened Bellmore's interest in cross-cultural communication. Today, her Peer Relationships, Ethnicity, Schools, and Media Lab examines teens' social media use through this lens. The lab is currently studying students at four high schools.

"We ask them whose social media posts they pay attention to and whose they interact with. They name these peers in their grade, and we evaluate those networks," Bellmore says.

First the participants are divided into two groups: those naming more peers who share their own ethnic identity and those naming more peers with a different identity. Then the researchers compare and contrast.

Bellmore expects the data to mirror findings about offline peer interactions.

"Offline, ethnic minority students benefit from having more same-ethnicity peers, whether we're looking at identity development or friendship quality," she says. "Cross-ethnic interactions help students see other perspectives and perform better academically."

If Bellmore's hypothesis is correct, her research

could fuel digital interventions for minority teens who feel marginalized. It could also shape schools' efforts to boost grades and create a welcoming environment for all.

### ***Preventing Negative Outcomes***

Alvin Thomas, an associate professor of human development and family studies in the UW School of Human Ecology, compares social media to a playground: "You know your child could get hurt there, but preventing them from going would stymie their development. Instead, you teach them how to be safe."

## ***Social media's upside — its ability to foster mental health — has barely been studied. UW researchers are filling the gap.***

Racial discrimination is one injury teens of color can experience online. The likelihood grows as their social media use increases. The Thomas Resilient Youth Lab studies this phenomenon in its efforts to understand how social media shapes mental health.

In the lab's study of social media use among 356 Black and Latino adolescents, teens who witnessed online racial discrimination reported more depression symptoms, and those who experienced it reported both anxiety and depression symptoms. Discrimination victims also reported more psychological distress, which was associated with feeling unable to act in academic domains. Having higher self-esteem tended to reduce this frozen feeling.

"To me, this means an excellent support system can be protective for a teen who's been the target of online discrimination," Thomas says.

Thomas expects to publish three related studies in 2025. Two explore how parents can protect teens from negative mental health outcomes after exposure to online racial discrimination. The other concerns compulsive internet use, whose negative mental health outcomes "aren't as homogenous as one might assume."

Finding ways to prevent negative outcomes, or decrease their impact, is the goal.

"Social media isn't going anywhere, and fearing it won't change that," Thomas says. "When something negative happens, parents must recalibrate their teens' perception of the world. Yes, the world's dangerous, but it's also full of beauty." ●

*Jessica Steinhoff '01 is a licensed psychotherapist who treats teens and young adults.*

## **Ways for Adults to Help**

Parents, teachers, and other adult role models can shape teens' digital habits and bolster their mental health. Here are tips from the UW experts.

### ***Check Your Own Habits***

"Many parents worry about their kids' smartphone habits when they should be more concerned about their own," says pediatrics professor Megan Moreno.

An honest assessment of your own digital behaviors is essential for good role modeling. If you're overusing your phone in front of your teen, forgive yourself and resolve to improve.

"Giving your teen your full attention shows them they matter and makes it easier to talk openly about how they use social media," Moreno says.

### ***Safeguard Sleep***

"It's important to notice when tech use is displacing sleep, which happens for lots of teens," says pediatrics assistant professor Ellen Selkie.

Learning what motivates your teen to use — and potentially overuse — social media is key. Try to avoid framing common struggles as addiction.

Selkie recommends the American Academy of Pediatrics' 5 Cs of Media Use, a framework to help parents discuss digital media with their kids. It asks parents of teens to consider their children's motivations for using social media, what content deserves attention, how their children tend to calm down, whether digital media use is crowding out more important activities, and how they can promote digital literacy through candid conversations.

### ***Monitor Mood Shifts***

"Parents and educators need to be aware of teens' mood changes," says associate professor of human development Alvin Thomas.

Some teens won't speak up if they've experienced discrimination or bullying. Instead, their feelings may emerge through actions.

"If your teen is more irritable than usual, avoiding friends, or spending extra time in their room, check in rather than assuming it's just adolescent moodiness," says Thomas.

### ***Be a Buffer***

"Be a soft landing spot for your teen, no matter what's happening with them," says Thomas.

For many teens, there will be days when school and social media feel like emotional hazards. Knowing a parent will accept them, warts and all, provides a sense of security.

"Your teen should feel like you're their buffer," Thomas says. "Someone who helps them make sense of jarring experiences."

— J.S.

# On Alumni

News from Home and Abroad

## Campus Is in Her Genes

*As she rises to the role of WFAA's CEO, Alisa Robertson '94, MBA'03's career comes full circle.*

From **Alisa Robertson '94, MBA'03's** early days enjoying Babcock ice cream on campus with her parents, UW–Madison has been a part of her identity.

Robertson is a Madison native, and her mother was a longtime UW employee — she spent a lot of time around campus with her family as a child. After earning her bachelor's degree, Robertson worked at Wood Communications, a public affairs firm, before returning to the university as assistant editor of *Update*, the alumni magazine for the Wisconsin School of Business. She earned her MBA while working at the business school. After progressing to associate dean for advancement, she transitioned to the UW Foundation, now the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA).

"I have a lot of emotional ties to the university," Robertson says. "I have learned and grown so much here — as a student and also throughout my career."

Robertson brings that special connection to campus to her new role as president and CEO of WFAA. She follows **Mike Knetter**, who has led WFAA since 2011, and on January 1, she will become the fifth leader in the organization's 80-year history.

### ***You've been on campus a long time — you must have found some hidden treasures.***

Like many Badgers, I have memories of classes in the Humanities Building. As a student, I worked in a clerical role for **Stanley Kutler**, the renowned history professor who won the legal case to release the Watergate tapes. I also have fond memories of the Helen C. White building, where I took many classes as an undergraduate English major. I had the opportunity to get to know several faculty members, including Professors **Susanne Wofford** and **Stan Henning**, who were both outstanding mentors. That's what is so special about the UW — the faculty are doing incredible work, and they remain so relatable and available to their students.

### ***When did you start to get interested in alumni and donor relations?***

While I was a student, Grainger Hall was built. During my senior year, I had one class in the Nicholas lecture hall there. The space was absolutely beautiful and



CAN PHOTOGRAPHY

*Robertson's vision for supporting the university includes "innovating and skating to where the puck is going," so as not to fall behind in a rapidly changing world.*

technologically advanced compared to other spaces on campus. I had some knowledge that Grainger Hall was built with donor support, but I didn't truly appreciate the value of that support at the time.

Four years later, when I joined the business school, the building was still new, and I had many opportunities to give tours to alumni and donors. I remember the tour script had a story about **John** and **Tashia Morgridge's** support of the Grainger Hall project, which at the time was critical to the school's ability to expand enrollment. A few years later, I had the opportunity to meet John and Tashia Morgridge, **Ab** and **Nancy Nicholas**, and many other donors who supported the university. Their generosity has become such a huge part of so many transformational improvements on campus — scholarships, professorships, buildings, and more. It's shown me the full circle of the student-alum-donor experience: seeing this building being built, hearing this story about

these donors who made it happen, and then getting to know them years later. The Badger community really is special.

### ***What have you learned during these years on campus?***

The world around us is changing quickly, and if we stand still, we're going to fall behind. In our work, we must keep innovating and skating to where the puck is going. Our organization changed significantly under Mike Knetter's leadership. He and **Paula Bonner** demonstrated outstanding leadership when they merged the foundation and the alumni association 10 years ago, understanding that it was in the best interest of the university. Working in partnership with faculty, staff, and leaders at UW-Madison has taught me that we need to be curious, be open to new opportunities, and learn from our mistakes. I'm proud that our team at WFAA embraces that approach, and I'm excited about the opportunities to continue innovating and driving results that benefit our university.

### ***You describe WFAA as an advancement organization. How do you define advancement?***

Broadly, the term *advancement* means engaging key stakeholders to move the university forward. More specifically, it means building pride, affinity, and community with stakeholders and securing resources to support the university. Now more than ever, philanthropic support, volunteer support, strategic advice from alumni and friends — those are the things that will differentiate the universities that advance and increase their impact on the world from those that do not.

### ***What do you see as the biggest challenges that the UW faces?***

Political polarization and a decline in trust and confidence in higher education are major challenges facing the UW and other universities around the country. At WFAA we strive to engage a broad set of alumni and friends of the university who have different viewpoints. We find that exposing stakeholders to the actual work that is being done at the UW — both research and education — can help build trust and confidence. We will also continue to partner with the UW to raise funds for important programs that alleviate costs for families, help students be more career-ready, and support research that will improve lives here in Wisconsin and out in the world.

### ***Where do you see UW-Madison's biggest opportunities?***

Chancellor Mnookin has articulated some of the UW's greatest opportunities on the horizon with the RISE [Research, Innovation, and Scholarly Excellence] initiatives — I am excited about the many ways that the UW can help address important societal issues and opportunities related to artificial intelligence,

sustainability, and helping people thrive as they age. University leaders are also committed to providing access to an affordable world-class education to as many students as possible. Incredible scholarship support provided by many donors around the world helps make this possible.

### ***What are WFAA's opportunities?***

A lot of our work is focused on building trusting relationships with individuals. That won't change. The UW has an incredibly large alumni base — as well as many other stakeholders, including parents, friends, and grateful patients and clients — spread out all over the world. Advances in technology can help us scale our operations to involve even more people in the great work that's happening at the UW. And we want to continue our focus on providing excellent stewardship. We are committed to honoring the intentions of our donors and sharing the impact of philanthropic support. I'm grateful for Mike's leadership and for our board's leadership, which have put WFAA in such a strong position to deliver on these commitments. I am honored and excited to continue working on behalf of my alma mater as president and CEO of WFAA.

**JOHN ALLEN**

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## **NOMINATE BADGERS FOR AWARDS**

Since 1936, the Wisconsin Alumni Association has honored alumni whose career success and dedication to the Wisconsin Idea have improved the world around them. Time and again, these honorees have demonstrated the ideals of progress, discovery, service, and leadership.

Today, the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association continues to acknowledge outstanding Badgers. If you know of any exceptional alumni who deserve public recognition, please nominate them for one of the following awards:

The **Forward Award** recognizes early-career and community achievement and honors rising stars within 15 years of graduation.

The **Luminary Award** honors alumni who serve as aspirational examples for others through significant achievement at least 15 years after graduation.

The **Distinguished Alumni Award**, WFAA's longest-standing honor, recognizes exceptional accomplishments over the course of a graduate's career or lifetime. Past recipients include the likes of dance pioneer **Margaret H'Doubler 1910, MA1924**, astronaut **Jim Lovell x'50**, Epic Systems founder **Judith Faulkner MS'67**, and Broadway actor **André De Shields '70**.

Visit [uwalumni.com/awards](http://uwalumni.com/awards) to nominate extraordinary alumni for a 2025 award. **The deadline is January 5, 2025.**

**STAFF**

**80**

Number of years the UW Foundation (now WFAA) has existed

**5**

Number of leaders since WFAA's founding in 1945, once Alisa Robertson takes the reins

**\$4.2B**

Number of dollars raised to support the university in WFAA's most recent campaign, All Ways Forward



## A Brief History of Bucky vs. Ducky

The Badger football team reignites a rivalry with a new member of the Big Ten Conference.

When the Badgers host the Oregon Ducks on November 16 at Camp Randall Stadium, they will be welcoming a fresh face to the Big Ten Conference. But these football programs are already familiar foes, having first faced off in 1977 and last competed at the Rose Bowl in both 2012 and 2020.

This year's game will be a rubber match of sorts: the all-time series is tied 3-3, with the Badgers winning the first three affairs and the Ducks prevailing in the past three. The aver-

*The Badgers lost a 28-27 heartbreaker to Oregon in the 2020 Rose Bowl.*

age scoring margin over the six matchups? Five points.

For Wisconsin, that's meant thrilling but heartbreaking losses in Pasadena. You may remember the 2012 game as the **Russell Wilson MSx'13** Rose Bowl. The transfer quarterback electrified the program in his lone season as a Badger, leading the highest-scoring offense in the Big Ten. Oregon's offense ranked third in the country, so it was no surprise when these juggernauts combined for 83 points and broke the Rose Bowl scoring record. The Badgers led 38-35 entering the fourth quarter, but the Ducks ran off 10 unanswered points to secure their first Rose Bowl win.

The teams wouldn't meet again until the 2020 Rose Bowl, which had a similar result. Wisconsin's 28-27 loss marked its fourth Rose Bowl defeat in a decade, all by a touchdown or less. The highlight was **Aron Cruickshank x'22's** 95-yard kick return — the second-longest scoring play in Rose Bowl history. **Jonathan Taylor x'21**

led the Badgers with more than 100 yards from scrimmage, but four team turnovers ultimately doomed the Badgers.

You have to go all the way back to September 9, 2000, to find better days for the Badgers in this matchup. Coming off consecutive Rose Bowl wins, Wisconsin lost its Heisman running back **Ron Dayne '17** to the NFL and 26 other players to suspension for unadvertised shoe-store discounts. But no matter: **Michael Bennett x'02** rushed for a whopping 290 yards to lead the Badgers to a 27-23 win over the Ducks in Madison. (Quarterback **Brooks Bollinger '03** had to complete just five passes for 65 yards.)

The Big Ten welcomed three other programs to its ranks this year: USC, Washington, and UCLA. But Oregon is the only new member visiting Camp Randall in 2024. And that leads us to one last trend that we hope sticks: the Badgers, at press time, are undefeated at home against the Ducks.

**PRESTON SCHMITT '14**



## 50s–70s

When **Jack Leissring '57, MS'61, MD'61** of Santa Rosa, California, opened our Summer 2024 issue to a Class Note from **E. Richard Stiehm '54, MD'57** and **Judy Hicks Stiehm '57** detailing their affinity for the work of artist **Otto Donald Rogers '58, MA'59**, he was moved to join the chorus: “I am also a fan and collector of Otto’s work,” he writes, “especially early work influenced by **Dean Meeker**, who taught, at Wisconsin, the first academic class in serigraphy by any college or university.” During his time at the UW, Leissring befriended now-renowned UW Art Department faculty members including Meeker, **Donald Anderson, Warrington Colescott, Harvey Littleton**, and **Alfred Sessler MA'45**, all of whom are represented in his extensive art collection. Thanks for writing in, Jack!

A declassified note: after 40 years with the Central Intelligence Agency, **William Cogger '66, MS'67** has been granted official permission to publicly name his employer. Cogger’s career with the CIA was primarily spent developing tools, widgets, and gadgets used by agents to complete their covert missions, many of which are still classified as “top secret.”

For his substantial pro bono legal work, **Robert Rubin '69, JD'72** was designated a Katahdin Counsel by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. Rubin is a civil litigation attorney in Rockport, Maine.

Here’s a reason to smile: **Leslie Will '76** of Boston is the recipient of the 2024 O. B. Vaughan Special Recognition Award from the American Board of Orthodontics. The award recognizes Will’s contributions to orthodontic education throughout her career, which includes faculty positions at the former Loyola University Chicago School of Dentistry, the Harvard

School of Dental Medicine, and the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine. She has served as the Anthony A. Gianelly Professor of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics at Boston University since 2009.

**“[I] think if people kind of come at life with curiosity ... it brings people together. It brings ideas together.”**

— **Brian Counselman '07**

**WELCOME, ALL!**  
The Wisconsin Alumni Association encourages diversity, inclusivity, nondiscrimination, and participation by all alumni, students, and friends of UW–Madison in its activities.

**BOOK NEWS?**  
See page 62.

**CLASS NOTES SUBMISSIONS**  
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It’s back to school for **Mary Risseeuw '77** of Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, who was awarded the 2024–25 Hazel Gnade Women’s Studies Fellowship at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Archives, where she was recently the recipient of the 2022–23 Albert A. Smith Fellowship. She was also awarded a 2024–25 research grant at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Risseeuw is a genealogist and historian who studies Dutch migration to Wisconsin in the 19th and 20th centuries and has lectured on the topic in the Midwest and in the Netherlands.

## 80s

**Michelle Behnke '83, JD'88** is the 2025–26 president of the American Bar Association. She is the fourth woman of color to lead the ABA; in 2005–06, she became the first Black person to serve as president of the State Bar of Wisconsin. Behnke is an attorney at Madison law firm Boardman Clark, which she joined in August after 26 years as principal of her independent law practice. She has been named among *The Best Lawyers in America* since 2006 and was presented with the Charles L. Goldberg Distinguished Service Award by the Wisconsin Law Foundation in 2022.

After 26 years with the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS), President **Morna**

**Foy '84, PhD'15** of Madison has retired. Foy joined WTCS in 1998 as a policy adviser and became president in 2013. During her tenure, she was credited with growth in dual-credit opportunities for high school students, transfer pathways, and student success outcomes.

How do you own your story? If you’re **Anne Gallagher '84, JD'88**, you write it. Gallagher is the author of the chapter “Unexpectedly Redirected: Loss to Possibility” in the anthology *Own Your Story: Empower. Connect. Create Change*. Gallagher is the director of sales and marketing at event venue Summit Chicago, executive director of the Luxury Law Summit, and a member of the editorial team for the *Global Legal Post*.

**Ernie Hanna MS'86** was named the 2024 Geotechnical Engineer of the Year by the Philadelphia section of the American Society of Civil Engineers. Hanna is a senior principal with environmental consulting firm GZA GeoEnvironmental. He has been with the firm for nearly 40 years, leading numerous projects including upgrades at the historic Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Badgers were everywhere at this year’s Olympic Games in Paris — including in the broadcast booth. **Greg Hughes '86** of Norcross, Georgia, traveled to Paris to help bring the games to fans back home as part of his work as executive vice president of communications with NBC Sports. Hughes joined NBC Sports in 2011 and has worked on several Olympic Games, including the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, which set the record for the most-watched television event in U.S. history with more than 219 million viewers. Before NBC, Hughes was president of his sports-media public relations firm, Sedan Communications.

After a fire demolished his Lodi, Wisconsin, motel in 2022, **Rod Ripley '87, MAcc'88**

## The Queen of Climate Justice

An alumna uses her Miss Earth title to advocate for the environment.

As a child, **Beatrice Millan-Windorski '24** traveled regularly from her hometown of Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, to a small village in the Philippines to visit her grandmother. They liked to watch beauty pageants together, including the Miss Earth competition.

“Pageantry has a special place in Filipino and Filipino-American communities,” Millan-Windorski says. In southeast Asia, the competitions are considered a valid way for young women to launch careers in politics and other high-profile positions.

Millan-Windorski’s global understanding of the role of pageantry made her a serious contender in teen competitions in the Milwaukee area during her high school years. Her service platform focused on helping refugee families who’d resettled in Wisconsin after escaping political conflicts in Myanmar and Afghanistan, and this experience inspired Millan-Windorski to pursue a degree in international studies and history at the UW.

Her long-standing passion for refugees melded with a growing awareness of climate change during a class with **Katherine Jensen**, an assistant professor of sociology and international studies. “She taught us how, on an international scale, there’s no recognition or legal pathways toward asylum [for climate refugees],” Millan-Windorski says. “I aspire to one day work in the international affairs space to expand those legal definitions to include those specifically affected by climate change.”

Millan-Windorski realized that pageantry, and specifically Miss Earth, could offer a path toward this dream, because the competition is dedicated to environmental advocacy and provides its winners with resources to help enact positive change. It’s also the only pageant formally recognized by the United Nations, and Miss Earth winners are typically invited to address the UN General Assembly.

Balancing her honors thesis and other schoolwork with pageant prep made for a busy senior year, but the effort paid off on New Year’s Eve in Orlando, Florida, when Millan-Windorski became the first Wisconsinite and first Filipina-American to be crowned Miss Earth USA. Almost immediately, the title helped her launch an educational series on climate displacement and climate refugees in collaboration with the Climate Justice Collaborative and We Are All America, a nonprofit dedicated to welcoming and protecting refugees and immigrants.

In November, Millan-Windorski will travel to Vietnam to compete for the 2024 world title — all while studying for the LSAT in order to apply to law schools. “It can be so hard to know where to begin, especially with huge issues like climate change and refugee rights,” she says. “The fact that I was able to win this title and gain access to all these resources is what really makes pageantry special and still relevant in today’s world.”

**SANDRA BARNIDGE '09, MA '13**



CARLOS VELEZ

rebuilt and reopened his business as Lucky’s Lodge on Lake Wisconsin. The lakeside abode features headboards hand-crafted by Ripley from old barn wood and nature photography taken by his son. Ripley, who played basketball for the Badgers from 1983 to 1987, is also the owner of Lucky’s 1313 on Regent Street in Madison.

## 90s

**Matthew Rolnick '92** of Downer’s Grove, Illinois, joined Hulk Hogan’s Real American Beer as senior vice president of partnerships and events. Rolnick was most recently vice president of strategy and innovation at event-planner Yaymaker.

Brace yourselves, Badgers: **Silvia Acevedo '94** of Milwaukee is prepared to scare with her contribution to the chilling children’s anthology *The Haunted States of America*. Acevedo’s short story, “La Llorona de los Siete Puentes (The Wailing Woman of the Seven Bridges),” represents Wisconsin in a collection of spooky tales from each of the 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. Before becoming a children’s book author, Acevedo spent more than 25 years as a journalist.

If you like the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, consider attending a musical retelling by modern bard **Joe Goodkin '98**. Goodkin is the composer of *Joe’s Odyssey*, a one-man folk opera of Homer’s story of Odysseus, which he has performed nearly 400 times in all 50 states and around the world. He also composed *The Blues of Achilles*, an acoustic homage to the *Iliad*’s story of the Trojan War. “I took a comparative literature class [in college] in which we read the *Odyssey* and a number of [works] inspired by the original,” Goodkin wrote for the classics blog *Sententiae Antiquae*. “[The class opened] my mind and heart to the idea that epic was a tradition, not a fixed artifact, and that tradition

is open for all to participate in.”

## 00s

The curtains are up on **Kimberly Cooper MBA'01**'s new role as senior vice president of marketing at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. Cooper joins the leadership team after more than 20 years of marketing leadership at Kraft, Walt Disney World, Nestlé, and Hilton. She most recently served as a global marketing lead at Amazon, where she led small business and consumer marketing and oversaw initiatives to provide internet access to underserved communities.

**Emily Reichert PhD'01** of Arlington, Massachusetts, is the clean-energy queen. She was named on the *Boston Globe's* 2024 Tech Power Players 50 list for her leadership in climate technology and economic development as CEO of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. The list celebrates the 50 most influential people in the New England technology sector. Reichert was named to the inaugural list in 2022 for her work as CEO of Greentown Labs, which she is credited with growing into the largest climate technology incubator in North America.

**Jay Bigalke '05** of Troy, Ohio, helped the United States Postal Service launch two new postage stamp sets in June. He traveled to Corpus Christi, Texas, to emcee the dedication event for the new Protect Sea Turtles stamps at the Texas State Aquarium. He then helped dedicate their new U.S. Flags stamps at Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota. Bigalke is the editor in chief of *Linn's Stamp News*.

**Adam Eichstedt '06** was named the 2024 Sports Information Director of the Year by 2ySIDA, the two-year-institution branch of the College Sports Communicators. The award recognizes Eichstedt's

commitment to promoting two-year student-athletes and teams in his role as the athletics communications director at Madison Area Technical College (MATC). Eichstedt joined the MATC athletics department as an editor in 2015 and was promoted to his current role in 2022.

## “A museum really is a community.”

— Paul Baker Prindle MA'08, MFA'09

Three cheers for Teacher of the Year! **Brian Counselman '07**, a science teacher at Malcolm Shabazz City High School in Madison, was one of five educators across the state who were named a 2025 Teacher of the Year by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. He also serves as the school's project-based learning coordinator, creating educational opportunities for students to improve themselves and their community. “[I] think if people kind of come at life with curiosity ... it brings people together. It brings ideas together,” Counselman told WMTV 15 News. “[It] ties into science, but life is a lot more than just science.”

Constantiam Biosciences, a Houston-based biotechnology start-up founded by **Daniel Goldman '07**, **Norman Ong '07**, and **Nicholas Schafer '08**, was awarded a Small Business Innovation Research grant from the National Human Genome Research Institute. The grant will fund the development of technologies aimed at addressing genetic variations whose influence on health is unknown. Constantiam specializes in studying genetic variation in the interest of improving medical interventions.

**Megan Arens '08, MS'11, PhD'22** is the new assistant superintendent of Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. She comes to the role from Oak

Creek West Middle School, where she served as principal since 2017. Arens has also held administrative positions in Chicago Public Schools and taught in Saint Charles, Illinois, and Cambridge, Wisconsin.

**Paul Baker Prindle MA'08, MFA'09** is the new **Gabriele Haberland [’80, MBA’82, PhD’92]** Director of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA). He comes to MMoCA after five years as director of the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at California State University–Long Beach. Previously, he served as director of the John and Geraldine Lilley Museum of Art at the University of Nevada–Reno, as gallery director at Edgewood College, and as a program assistant at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. “A museum really is a community,” he told the *Cap Times* in April. “It’s not just the building; it’s all the people that are here. It’s the artists; it’s the visitors, the educators, the volunteers.”

**Ellie Foster '08, MS'11** knows that with great power comes great responsibility — and she’s using her power for good. Foster is the codirector of education for the Kevin Love Fund (KLF), a mental-health advocacy organization started by Miami Heat basketball player Kevin Love. Foster cowrote the KLF’s free, arts-based, social-emotional learning curriculum and mental health education program, which has reached more than 65,000 students worldwide. When the KLF partnered with Sony and the Spider-Verse on their most recent short film, *The Spider Within*, which shows Miles Morales (Spider-Man) having a panic attack, Foster cowrote a lesson about navigating difficult experiences through writing and art. Foster credits her emphasis on students’ authentic self-expression to her mentor and UW

**DEATH NOTICES • NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE, AND EMAIL UPDATES** [alumnichanges@uwalumni.com](mailto:alumnichanges@uwalumni.com) • Alumni Changes, WFAA, 1848 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53726 • 888-947-2586

**OBITUARIES** Brief death notices for Wisconsin Alumni Association (WAA) members and friends appear in *Badger Insider*, WAA’s magazine for its members. You may submit full-length obituaries for online posting at [uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit](http://uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit).

**X-PLANATION** An x preceding a degree year indicates that the person did not complete, or has not yet completed, that degree at UW–Madison.



MINISTRY OF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT AND INFORMATION

## On, Singapore

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong '94 brings Badger sensibilities to his role.

A few decades before **Lawrence Wong '94** took his place as Singapore's fourth prime minister in 2024, he was zooming around New Glarus and Devil's Lake on his motorcycle and plucking his guitar on State Street. He was also studying economics at UW–Madison and learning some foundational lessons — ones that would later come in handy for leading a nation.

Wong enrolled at the UW after earning a scholarship from Singapore's Public Service Commission. "Back then, I had never traveled outside of Southeast Asia," he says. "I could not afford an overseas education all the way in America. The scholarship was an opportunity of a lifetime."

He then completed his master's in applied economics at the University of Michigan in 1995 before returning to Singapore to work as an economist for the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He didn't intend to stay in the public sector, but the work drew him in.

"Initially, I thought I might leave after a while and pursue a career in finance. But eventually, I found my calling in public service," Wong says. "The work was meaningful and fulfilling, and it was work that I could never do in the private sector."

As a greenhorn economist, he began his career with an assignment to study the 1997 Asian financial crisis. "The gap between textbook theory and real-world economics was stark. I found myself suddenly thrust in an environment where I had to learn on the go," Wong says. "But my time at UW–Madison provided me with excellent foundations to adapt and to navigate those turbulent times."

Wong took on several more civil service roles in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health before running for political office in 2011, when he first became a member of parliament. Throughout more than a decade in Singaporean politics, Wong served in a variety of cabinet positions, including minister for education, minister for finance, and minister for national development.

In 2022, as deputy prime minister, Wong launched an initiative that should strike a chord with Wisconsinites: "Forward Singapore." Now prime minister, he is continuing to build an agenda reminiscent of the Wisconsin Idea and the state motto. As he said in a speech last August, "Forward Singapore is ... to keep our society strong and united; to share the benefits of progress with all, not just some; to uplift all Singaporeans, not just a few."

ESTHER SEIDLITZ

School of Education professor **Erica Halverson**.

This just in: **Dylan Brogan '09** is the new communications manager for the City of Madison. Brogan was most recently a senior reporter for *Isthmus*, a monthly Madison newspaper for which he covered city government and city life. He was also a producer on Madison news podcast *City Cast*. In his new role, Brogan will be a spokesperson for city government and will coordinate communication and outreach efforts. Brogan is a lifelong Madisonian and began his journalism career in radio, including the Wisconsin Radio Network and Madison's WORT.

## 10s

**Saili Kulkarni MS'10, PhD'15** was named the 2024 Outstanding Professor by San José State University. Kulkarni is an associate professor of special education. Her research examines the intersections of disability and race in teacher education. She was one of the first recipients of the Spencer Foundation's Racial Equity Grant, which funded her research on discipline disparities for disabled children of color. In 2022, she was inducted into the Susan Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame.

**Emily Brennan '13** is a certified people person after receiving her doctorate in anthropology from the University of South Carolina–Columbia in May. Her dissertation examined how stress influenced human health in Berlin from the 13th through 18th centuries.

**Katy Lang '17** is making (radio) waves in Wausau as the new regional manager of Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR). She previously served as director of education and community engagement at Wausau's Grand Theater. In her new role, Lang will continue to strengthen WPR's engagement in central

Wisconsin to enrich the network's storytelling.

## 20s

**James Zehren '21** of Denver was named a 2023 Rising Star by Cynopsis Media. The award honors emerging leaders in the media industry who are 35 and younger. Zehren received the award for his work as a social media manager with professional women's sports league network Athletes Unlimited, where he is now a content marketing manager.

Medical school exams and a high-pressure work environment were the perfect *Jeopardy!* preparation for **Amy Hummel**, a Milwaukee emergency room doctor who maintained a five-game winning streak on the popular game show this past spring. Hummel was first invited to compete on *Jeopardy!* in 2022, during her residency at UW Hospital, but was unable to attend at the time. After her successful performance this year, she was invited to compete in an upcoming Tournament of Champions.

**Ada Zhang** received the 2024 Whiting Award in Fiction for her debut collection, *The Sorrows of Others: Stories*. The annual Whiting Foundation awards recognize 10 emerging writers in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. *Sorrows* follows characters in both America and China as it explores themes of home, belonging, and relationships in the aftermath of China's Cultural Revolution. "Zhang infuses her beautiful outsiders and hopeful misfits with deep humanity," the selection committee wrote. "It is the warm and generous depiction of what it feels like to be alone that proves her great subject." Zhang was the 2023–24 James C. McCreight Fiction Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

*Megan Provost '20 hopes these Class Notes find you well.*



## Bolstering Native Students in Health Care

With support from the children of Ralph '51, MD'54 and Eugenie Olsen, a UW center is increasing the number of Indigenous people in medicine.

The Native American Center for Health Professions (NACHP) was founded in 2012 by **Erik Brodt**, an Ojibwe family medicine physician, to improve recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Native American health professional students (above) at UW-Madison. This center has provided instrumental support for Indigenous students from the Schools of Medicine and Public Health, Nursing, Pharmacy, Social Work, and Veterinary Medicine, with the goal of improving the overall health and well-being of Native people and communities.

**Ralph "Doc" Olsen '51, MD'54** generously gave annual contributions to support NACHP. He was a passionate pediatrician, a lifelong Wisconsinite, and a proud Badger. Born in 1929, Olsen came of age in Milwaukee and developed a profound love of the outdoors. During his journeys throughout Canada, Wisconsin, and the western United States, Olsen developed a deep respect for Native cultures and became aware of the unmet health care needs among tribal communities, leading to his desire to become a doctor.

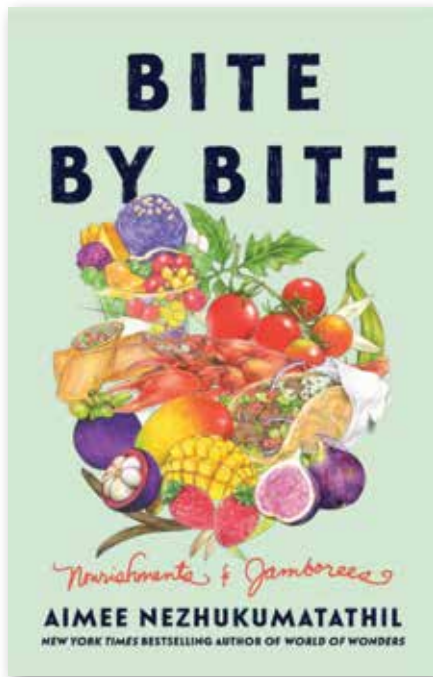
Ralph met his wife, Eugenie, while they were both serving in the army. The couple worked hard, volunteered often, and raised their children to appreciate their values. "Our parents taught us to respect and preserve nature, explore the world, and learn about history, music, art, and different cultures," says their daughter **Jordana Lenon '84, '94**.

Following the death of Ralph and Eugenie in 2023, their children created the Ralph N. Olsen, MD, Native American Scholarship for Health Professions. With gifts from donors like the Olsen family, NACHP is helping to increase the representation of Indigenous people in health care while building interconnected relationships among tribal communities.

Success is evident in the extraordinary graduation rates of all Native American and Alaska Native health professional students at the School of Medicine and Public Health, averaging just under 100 percent. And since the inception of NACHP, the number of Native applicants has increased by 240 percent.

"UW-Madison not only gave many in my family an education and training in fields where we could enjoy meaningful careers and enrich our lives, but it also taught us to keep on learning, to respect others who may not share our beliefs and opinions, and, above all, to be grateful for the opportunities we have had," says Lenon. "I've worked for the university for the last 28 years, and I've seen firsthand the positive impact that UW professors and staff have on our students. To be able to give back in such a meaningful way makes it even more worthwhile."

**NICOLE HEIMAN**



From rambutan to waffles, the bounty of *Bite by Bite* invites readers to a feast of food for thought.

## Slices of Life

Aimee Nezhukumatathil's *Bite by Bite* explores the nourishing and narrative properties of food.

In her latest essay collection, *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees*, **Aimee Nezhukumatathil** greets her readers, takes their coats, and pulls up a chair. She welcomes them to indulge in a smorgasbord of stories that start with food and that spill into every other facet of life that's nourished by it. Naturally, she starts at home.

"For what is home if not the first place you learn what does and does not nourish you?" Nezhukumatathil asks in the introduction to *Bite by Bite*. "The first place you learn to sit still and slow down when someone offers you a bite to eat?"

From here, she guides her readers through a gastronomic examination of the unparalleled power of food and flavor to create associations, evoke memories, trace histories, and tell stories. Rambutan is unruly, much like the author's curly tresses and her teenage rebellion. Mango is a family tree with roots that cross oceans. Through vignettes steeped in sentiment and finished with thoughtful reflection, Nezhukumatathil invites us to eat, taste, and remember with her.

"[*Bite by Bite*] uses food to talk about what it means to be human — to love, to learn, to laugh, to lose," writes Clint Smith, author of the 2022-23 Go Big Read book, *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery across America*. "Nezhukumatathil's writing has changed the way I look at food and made me infinitely more grateful for those whom I share it with."

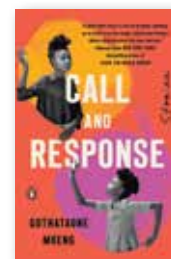
Nezhukumatathil was the 2000-01 Diane Middlebrook Poetry Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing and is the author of the *New York Times* best-selling essay collection *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments*. She is a professor of English and creative writing at the University of Mississippi.



## Languishing

**COREY KEYES MS'91, PHD'95**

This book examines the disconcerting prevalence of languishing — "the low-grade mental weariness that affects our self-esteem, motivation, and sense of meaning" — in today's world and provides guidance for reversing it ... for flourishing. Instead of the quick fixes typical of the self-help industry, Keyes offers simple, impactful steps to create lasting change. Keyes is a professor of sociology at Emory University in Atlanta.



## Call and Response: Stories

**GOTHATAONE MOENG**

Moeng takes readers to her home in Botswana — to her village, Serowe, and to the capital in Gaborone — in a collection of stories about female protagonists seeking extraordinary possibilities outside their ordinary circumstances. Readers join Moeng's characters at weddings, in mourning, exploring sexuality, and seeking their places in the world. Moeng was the 2023-24 Carol Houck Smith Fiction Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.



## Still Sal

**KEVIN HENKES X'83**

Fans of Newbery Honor-winning *The Year of Billy Miller* will delight in joining Billy's younger sister Sal on her first day of first grade. In Henkes's novel for young readers, Sal's excitement for school is quickly quelled by catastrophe upon catastrophe — including a misspelled name and an embarrassing tumble in front of the cool kids. With some encouragement from family, friends, and a new teacher, Sal braves the next few days and sees a bright first-grade future in store.



Submit your book news at [uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf](http://uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf) and visit [goodreads.com/wisalumni](http://goodreads.com/wisalumni) to find more works by Badger alumni and faculty.

*The contents of a kid's pockets after a day of play become works of art in Still: The Art of Noticing.*

## Natural Treasures

Aerospace-engineer-turned-artist Mary Jo Hoffman '87 captures quiet moments in her blog-turned-book, *Still: The Art of Noticing*.

For **Mary Jo Hoffman '87**, morning walks aren't times to zone out, but rather to pay attention. In *Still: The Art of Noticing*, Hoffman compiles more than a decade's worth of found objects and keen observations in a volume that invites readers to stop and stay a while in its pages, and to do some noticing of their own.

*Still* began on January 1, 2012. After leaving her 17-year career in aerospace engineering, Hoffman committed to capturing one image per day of an object in nature, which she shared on her blog, [stillblog.net](http://stillblog.net). Her photos celebrate the varied ecosystems of her Shoreview, Minnesota, home: a radiant ladder of sumac branches, a summer windowsill's worth of dead insects, a gradient of dried flowers, and a mesmerizing arrangement of fruit pits.

"Dear Universe," the pit post begins, "I've got a lot on my plate right now. And you seem to want to keep adding more. Please know that I will do my best, but that [at] the moment my plate [is] full. ... If your needs are urgent, you may want to find another solution."

Over 12 years, Hoffman's blog has garnered the attention of Martha Stewart, *Better Homes & Gardens*, and *Midwest Living*. It has inspired collaborations with Target, West Elm, the United States Botanic Garden, and the Scottish National Opera. Now in print, *Still* brings Hoffman's sharp eye and earthy wisdom to home libraries.

"What four thousand images (and counting) have shown me is that the daily discipline of looking at the world eventually becomes the habit of living in the world," Hoffman writes.

In *Still*'s insightful essays, topics range from the philosophies behind her work to "The 72 Microseasons of the North," based on a concept from an ancient Japanese seasonal calendar.

"The images are stunning. ... But don't skip past the words," writes Hannah Agran of *Midwest Living*. "Hoffman's intimate, engaging essays opened my mind to new ways of thinking about the natural world and the creative process."



### **Malas**

**MARCELA FUENTES**

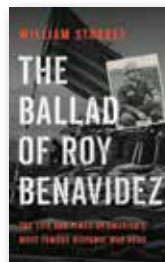
Fuentes's debut novel portrays a Texas family and a curse that's followed them for generations. Alternating between the perspectives of a rebellious teenage daughter and the mysterious stranger from whom she can't stay away, *Malas* considers the lives of women, the keeping of secrets, and the meaning of family. The book was a *Good Morning America* Book Club pick. Fuentes was the 2016-17 James C. McCreight Fiction Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.



### **You Killed Chris: A Friend's Fight for Justice**

**LINDA SCHULKO '71, MA'72 AND MARI ZOERB HANSEN '99, MA'01**

On May 26, 1968, UW freshman Christine Rothschild was found dead outside of Sterling Hall. Decades of investigation never yielded an arrest. As Rothschild's case went cold, her friend and classmate Linda Schulko '71, MA'72 began investigating on her own. She and researcher Mari Zoerb Hansen '99, MA'01 now bring Rothschild's case to the true-crime community on the 10th season of James Wolner's *Dakota Spotlight* podcast.



### **The Ballad of Roy Benavidez: The Life and Times of America's Most Famous Hispanic War Hero**

**WILLIAM STURKEY MA'07**

Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez joined the U.S. military to escape Jim Crow-era Texas. During the Vietnam War, he led a life-saving rescue mission that left him permanently disabled. *Ballad* chronicles Benavidez's remarkable life, his heroism, and his legacy in the Latino community. Sturkey is an associate professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania.

**MEGAN PROVOST '20**

## In Her Own Judgment

Justice Geraldine Hines JD'71 learned from her mentors — and learned to follow her own heart as well.

In 2014, when Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick was preparing to appoint an associate justice to his state's supreme court, he had many attorneys to choose from. **Geraldine Hines JD'71** wasn't the obvious choice. Her career included the sort of things that lawyers try to avoid if they want to be appointed to the highest offices: she was a defense attorney, she advocated for the rights of the poor and the marginalized, and she spoke up about how the judiciary lacked diversity.

Patrick picked her anyway, making Hines the first Black woman to serve on the Massachusetts Supreme Court.

Born in the Jim Crow-era Mississippi Delta, Hines says she didn't experience a majority-white community until she went to the UW for law school. "My first real exposure outside of the Black community was Madison," she says. "At my college, we did have interactions with white folks. We had white professors, but that was not the norm. So when I came to Madison, it was a little bit of a culture shock, and everything was different from anything I had ever experienced."

Recruited to the UW, Hines didn't initially intend to pursue a career as a judge. Her inspirations were civil rights attorneys, such as Marian Wright Edelman. "Here was a Black woman lawyer. I had never seen that. And I said, I want to be like her," she says. "Growing up with Jim Crow and seeing the way things were, I kind of fixed on the law as a way to accomplish the social change goals that I wanted to see."

At the UW, she studied under **James E. Jones Jr. LLB'56**,

*Hines was the first Black woman to serve on the Massachusetts Supreme Court.*



RYUJI SUZUKI

the law school's first — and at that time only — Black professor. Their relationship was close, if not always smooth: Jones advised Hines to be mindful of how much trouble she caused.

"We had a very contentious political relationship because we were of different generations," Hines says. "He would be counseling me to be more moderate in my thinking and my approach to things, and I wasn't ready to do that. But it was a healthy relationship."

After graduating, Hines moved to Boston and worked first in legal aid, then as a defense and civil rights attorney. In 2001, after 30 years of practice, she was appointed to a judgeship in the Massachusetts Superior Court. After 13 years, she was appointed

to fill a vacancy on the state's appeals court and 18 months later to the supreme court. She continued to question authority and advocate for fairness in the law. She wrote decisions that opposed excessive bail and challenged the standard police practice of assuming those who flee are guilty of a crime.

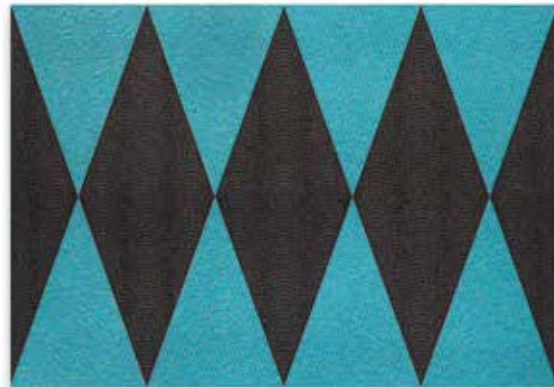
"If I had been planning to be a judge," she says, "I probably would never have done some of the things that I did in my career because people with those aspirations make safe choices about who they represent and policy issues that they support or advocate for. And I was never constrained by this desire to curry favor with the people who make judgeships happen."

**JOHN ALLEN**





MACARTHUR FOUNDATION



RIK SFERRA (2)



## Building on Ancient Art Forms

Dyani White Hawk MFA'11's work helps viewers to see Indigenous contributions with new eyes.

When artist **Dyani White Hawk MFA'11** talks about the role of Indigenous peoples in art history, she doesn't mince words.

"The way art history is taught today reflects how the contributions of Indigenous people to this continent are not recognized, honored, and celebrated as equal to their European and European American counterparts," she says.

As one of the country's most celebrated Indigenous artists, White Hawk is intent on changing that paradigm. She uses beadwork, quillwork, paintings, video, and installations threaded with ideas of community and ances-

**White Hawk's intensive labor celebrates the under-recognized work of the many Indigenous women who made similar art throughout history. Visit [dyaniwhitehawk.com](http://dyaniwhitehawk.com) to see more of her work.**

tral relationships to land related to her Lakota heritage.

In 2023, she won a MacArthur Fellowship. The \$800,000 stipend allows her the flexibility to focus on projects without financial pressure, but she's also thankful for the network of "phenomenal thinkers" that the so-called genius grant allows her to interact with.

The Minneapolis artist boasts an impressive array of work, but her abstract paintings and beadwork are especially eye-catching. White Hawk often combines painting with bands of exacting, intricate beadwork shaped into geometric forms and patterns. Such intensive labor celebrates the under-recognized work of the many Indigenous women who made similar art throughout history.

Most strikingly, she exhibited a 14-by-8-foot fully beaded painting at the prestigious Whitney Biennial exhibition in 2022, and the artwork makes a statement with its scale. "There's a quiet

strength to the piece," she says, explaining that she wanted to intentionally take up space equivalent to that typically occupied by non-Indigenous male artists.

In a video created for the exhibition, she points out that abstract art was not invented by European artists, as many believe, but that Indigenous peoples have been creating abstract art for millennia.

Next for White Hawk is exhibiting more of her work in galleries across the United States, as well as gearing up for a major exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2025.

She says she couldn't be more thankful she earned her master of fine arts on a campus where she felt supported. "Here [at UW-Madison] was a program that had a strong number of Indigenous faculty, which was really important to me. They understood my history, my lineage, and my perspective on education."

**DAVID SILVERBERG**



BRUCE RICHTER

## State-of-the Art Station

WSUM radio has come a long way since the days of sending signals via dorm power lines.

It's unusual for a large university not to have a student radio station, but for several years, that was the case for UW-Madison until WSUM 91.7 FM began broadcasting in 2002. The station's predecessor, WLHA, broadcast through the res halls' power lines rather than from a tower. The station took various forms from 1952 until 1993, when it switched from AM to FM and ran afoul of the FCC for using too much power.

After years of effort, WSUM acquired a tower in the town of Montrose, Wisconsin, and began broadcasting with full power. In contrast to WLHA, which could initially only be heard in some

Lakeshore dorms, WSUM's 5,500-watt signal extends outside of Madison nearly as far north as the Wisconsin Dells.

More than 200 student volunteers are involved with the award-winning station, which has 17 paid student staff and two full-time employees. WSUM has an internet station and an FM live station and broadcasts podcasts, talk shows, sports, and news as well as music.

In 2008, the station moved into its current 3,000-square-foot location, on the fourth floor of the Student Activity Center on East Campus Mall. Before that, it made do with standard office space in the Towers on State Street above Urban Outfitters — a step up from its brief home in a graduate student's office in Vilas Hall.

The current space was specially designed to be a radio station, with soundproofing on the walls and six studios, including

*Dominic Dorais-Burt x'25 (center) deejays his radio show "Songs I'll Show My Children" on WSUM in September, featuring two friends as guests. Deejays play MP3s, CDs, and vinyl, and one of them even brings in his own cassette tapes to play on his show.*

one each for broadcasting, podcasts, and training and three for editing. "The space we're in was designed specifically for WSUM, and WSUM students at the time had a hand in planning the layout," says **Kelsey Brannan '14**, director of student radio.

The spacious area pays tribute to WLHA with historical photos, newspaper articles, and memorabilia covering nearly every inch of the walls, along with a profusion of concert posters.

"What we have is pretty phenomenal — it's state of the art," says station manager **Anna Thompson x'25**, adding that they have "the Cadillac of turntables."

Thompson has been involved with the radio station since her freshman year and says it helped her find community on a large campus. "It's a great gig," she says. "I've loved it very much. Even if no one was listening, I'd still do it."

**NIKI DENISON**

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