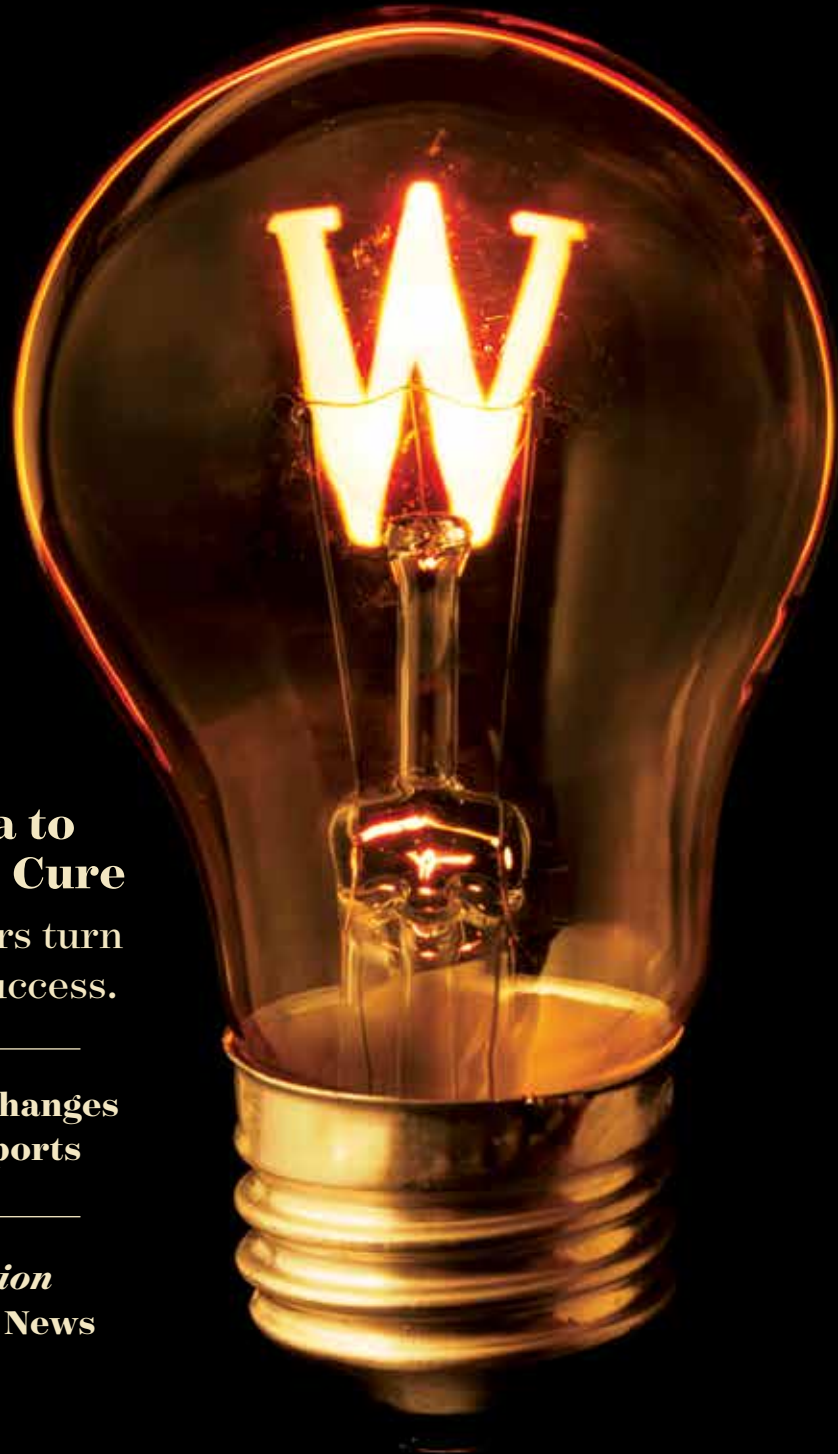


OnWisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS FALL 2025



From Idea to Company to Cure

UW researchers turn
science into success.

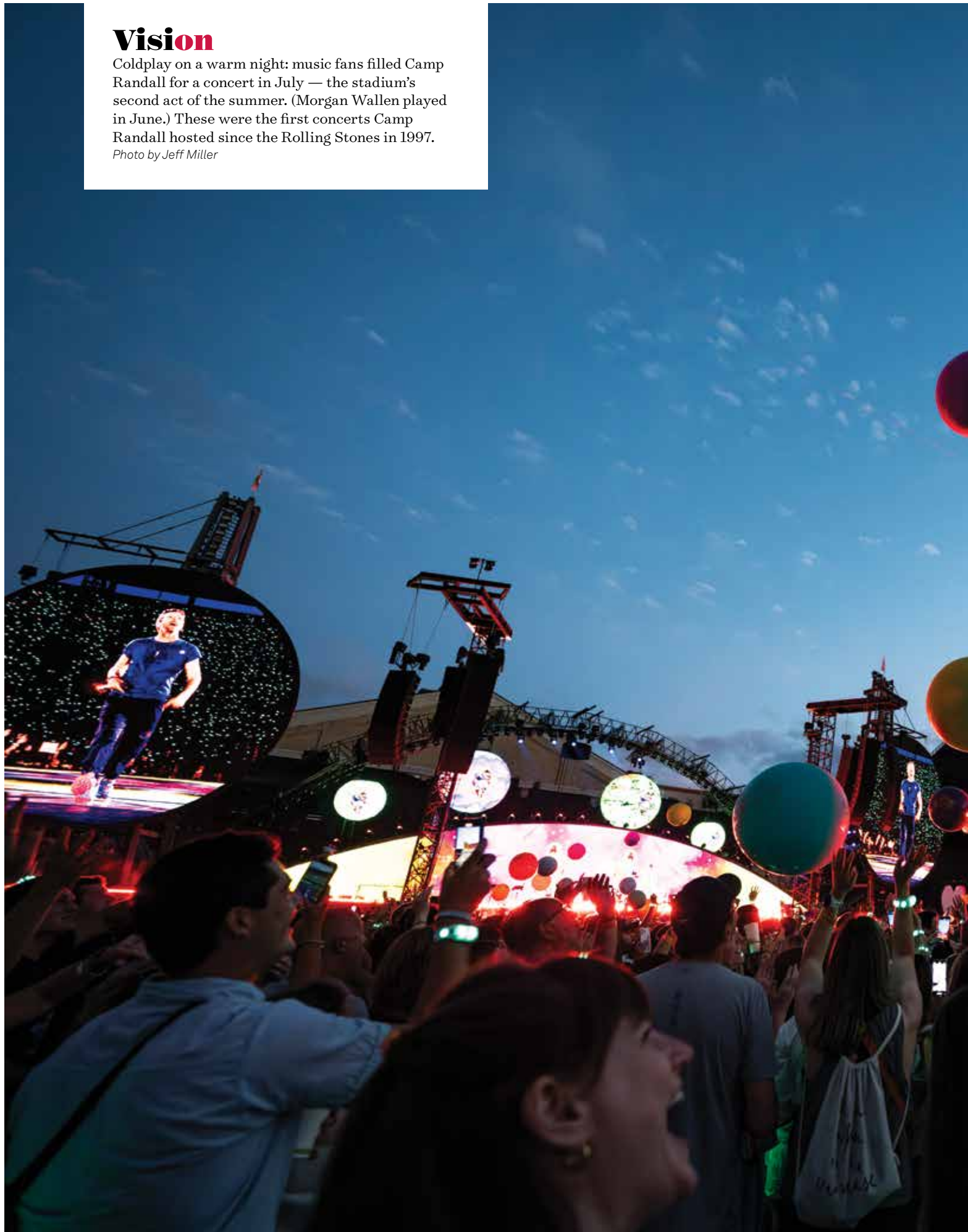
Earthshaking Changes for College Sports

How the *Onion* Invented Fake News

Vision

Coldplay on a warm night: music fans filled Camp Randall for a concert in July — the stadium's second act of the summer. (Morgan Wallen played in June.) These were the first concerts Camp Randall hosted since the Rolling Stones in 1997.

Photo by Jeff Miller





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OnWisconsin

Badger sports teams have waged a legendary border battle with the Minnesota Gophers. See page 46.

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DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP



UW ATHLETICS/TOM LYNN

FEATURES

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For 100 years, the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation has helped UW researchers patent their inventions. Now it looks to help them launch start-up companies. *By John Allen*

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Meet recent UW grads who found themselves on unexpected career paths, discovering new passions. *By Allison Garfield '20*

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Badger sports teams have been playing the Minnesota Gophers since the 19th century — a heated rivalry involving wild games and personality clashes. *By Doug Moe '79*



BRUCE RICHTER

Homecoming's parades, pep rallies, and pageantry never get old. See page 55.

Cover

WARF celebrates a century of bringing brilliant ideas to the marketplace. Photo by Bryce Richter

The Priceless Value of Research

Thank you for Tom Ziemer's article on Dr. William Murphy's discoveries for arthritis treatment [On Campus, Summer 2025 *On Wisconsin*]. I was just asking my orthopedic surgeon at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital last week as he showed me an X-ray of my bone-on-bone knee, why couldn't surgeons inject cartilage into the joints to replace the deteriorated cartilage? The room of doctors, PAs, and nurses laughed and said, "That's the million-dollar question!"

Lo and behold, a week later, I opened my *On Wisconsin* magazine and saw: "New Arthritis Treatment." I am ecstatic to read that a UW lab team is making breakthroughs on the production of a protein that supports cartilage formation, a treatment that will transform the lives of millions. Once again, we see the value of university research.

Teresa Meade '72

New York City

[RE: "The UW Lands Two Leading Dementia Researchers," On Campus, Summer 2025]: This is fantastic. These researchers, having access to samples given through the WRAP [Wisconsin Registry for Alzheimer's Prevention] longitudinal study, will do nothing but good toward finding a possible prevention and/or a cure for Alzheimer's disease.

William Clifton '84, PhD'98

Stoughton, Wisconsin

Checks on Artificial Intelligence

Although I see the merits of AI in many areas of science, I generally fit into the category of what "Quantum Leaps in Education" [Summer 2025 *On Wisconsin*] labels AI doomerism. As a humanist, I see very real threats posed by AI to our democracy and our shared humanity.

The article shows its pro-tech bias from the start in its cover subhead: "Cutting-edge

classes prepare students for a brave new world." The subhead seems oblivious to its misguided allusion to Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, which is a frightening depiction of a dystopian future.

Later, there is another tin-ear allusion, this time to 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Most viewers will remember the spaceship's super-computer HAL as a dire warning of the dangers of technology. The article's computer expert somehow misses that point.

Given the vast sums of money AI is showering on academia, the pro-AI bias is sad but predictable. I long to see a humanistic response to AI boosterism.

George Savage PhD'85

Madison

Editor's Note: *Science fiction fans may share your concern about the HAL 9000 computer. (Some even wonder: "If HAL 9000 was murderous, how bad must the first 8,999 models have been?") But if you know your lore from 2001: A Space Odyssey, you'll remember that HAL (short for Heuristically Algorithmic computer) was built in Urbana, Illinois. It's just the kind of sloppy work you'd expect from the Fighting Illini. As our article implied, we're confident that Badger scientists will do better than our Big Ten rivals to the south.*

My wife has taught master's-level clinical psychology. To address the possibility of students using AI to write a term paper, I came up with the following check. Ask the students to provide an oral explanation for how they came up with the ideas they presented in their research paper. Once AI is adopted as a viable tool for conducting research, students should be required to cite in their papers those portions that were AI-assisted. Students should be required to describe and defend their original ideas and motiva-

tions that led them to AI-supported research.

Bernard Roth '77

Santa Barbara, California

Back to Back to School

I worked as a PA on the film *Back to School* ["When Rodney Dangerfield Went *Back to School*," Summer 2025]. At the end of the shoot, I was assigned to go up to Rodney Dangerfield's room at the Inn on the Park and help him pack his things. When I got there, he had a cardboard box half filled with open Kleenex boxes, leftover snacks, rolls of unused toilet paper, anything and everything he thought was worth saving. As a child of the Depression, Rodney didn't want anything to go to waste.

As he threw in the last few items he could find, he turned to me with the still-not-quite-filled box and in his unmistakable Rodney Dangerfield voice said, "What should I do about all this extra space?" as he shook his bounty. I looked in the box and said, "You might as well take the bathrobes. You've taken everything else." His response? "Great idea. Throw 'em in!" So I did.

Eric Lee '83

El Segundo, California

After 12 years [away from college], I went back to school in 1984 and was there on Bascom as Rodney Dangerfield came strutting past in his bathrobe. He told the director, "I don't feel comfortable saying that line," so the director threw it out. The photographer who took the photo in the magazine must have been standing almost right in front of me.

Scott Wilcott '86

Marshfield, Wisconsin

[The filming of *Back to School*] was also covered in the 1986 *Badger* yearbook. Filming took longer than expected because it rained so much that fall. It was cool to see the production down at Slichter Hall, on Bascom Hill,

and elsewhere. And to this day, it's fun to see friends show up in the crowd scenes — especially the one at Library Mall by the fountain.

Steve Lehr '87

Minneapolis

A Turbulent Time

["Chasing the Story with David Maraniss," Summer 2025, was] an eye-opening article, especially since his topics are so relatable to me — a fellow UW grad and Wisconsinite. ... Why have I never read Maraniss's books? I will now.

Nancy Merriman '65

Milwaukee

I found David Maraniss's book [*They Marched into Sunlight*] a fascinating read. In October 1967, I was in class in the Commerce Building. Dow Chemical was in town recruiting, and the halls were lined with people protesting their involvement in the Vietnam War. Once the building was cleared of protesters, we were allowed to leave, and when we got outside, we saw the carnage that ensued. There were people lying everywhere on the grass — some crying, some bleeding, and some being attended to. It was a frightening scene.

Two years later, having been drafted, I experienced similar fears and trauma in Vietnam. [I returned and enrolled in graduate school, and] the bombing of Sterling Hall brought back some very bad memories. Then, the day that I presented my thesis to my accounting seminar, there were more protests, and the police were using tear gas. The building's ventilation system drew the tear gas in, and we had to change rooms three times so I could finish. It was a turbulent time, not unlike today.

Greg Bewick '68, MBA'71

Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Love for Paul's Book Store

Dean Robbins's article in the

Summer 2025 *On Wisconsin* [Bygone, "Farewell to Paul's Book Store"] does justice to Paul Askins, who in his quiet way created a remarkable space. He was so well respected that, during the often violent anti-Vietnam protests, his bookstore was one of the few without broken windows. He was kind to student poets and writers.

It was in that window that my first ragged chapbook appeared. The shop had a nourishing peacefulness that emanated from Paul. I cherish the memory of rainy afternoons when, with friends who also loved the place, we read for hours whatever took our fancy. The shop was both treasure house and the most refreshing, benign refuge.

Margaret Benbow '73

Madison

Whenever I revisited Madison after moving to the Pacific Northwest years ago, Paul's Book Store always seemed to draw me in like a magnet with its eclectic selection of books and the atmosphere. It was definitely a "state of mind" as well as an important independent bookstore. The article brought back fond memories. So did the splendid drone photo of the Memorial Union Terrace [Vision].

Kathryn Steenson Whitmer '59, MS'62

Bellingham, Washington

Dean Robbins's "Farewell to Paul's Book Store" was the saddest and best-written article I can recall reading in *On Wisconsin*. To be sadder would take something like losing lecture hall Room 125 in Ag Hall. The article could not have been better in capturing the flavor of Paul's, and the same goes for the photo. He even mentioned (indirectly) my favorite place in the store, to the right when you entered, by the window, with the old ag and forestry reports.

Thomas Straka '72, MS'73

Pendleton, South Carolina

We want to hear from you! Please email your letters to 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.

Beyond Frozen Pizza

How nice to read about Steenbock Library's cookbook collection in the Summer 2025 *On Wisconsin* [Exhibition, "Now We're Cookin'"]. One of the perks of my student job there was learning about new cuisines while circulating and shelving hundreds of books. As [I was] a relatively novice cook, all those recipes were a great introduction to food beyond noodles and frozen pizza!

Rachel Gavelek Konkle '98

Kenosha, Wisconsin

Cover to Cover

I loved the Summer 2025 issue! I couldn't put it down. I read it from cover to cover and then over again. From the Recognition "A Heart for Africa" about Hezouwe Walada to artist Michael Velliquette ["Paper Magic"] to writer David Maraniss ["Chasing the Story with David Maraniss"], every story was wonderful and personal.

Deb Crager '87

Madison

Online



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

PAUL'S BOOK STORE FOREVER

In our summer issue, we mourned the closing of a campus-area institution with "Farewell to Paul's Book Store." The article spurred an outpouring of letters, some of which appear on this page. To read more, search for "Farewell to Paul's Book Store: Letters" on our website. You can also add a comment to the original article to share your own memories of the incomparable used bookstore.

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Where Breakthroughs Begin

Research grants do more than fund studies.

One of the most pressing issues on campus in 2025 has been the threat to federally funded research. UW–Madison's research expenditures top \$1.7 billion a year, and about half of that comes from federal grants. When the government announced changes that would limit those funds, the UW felt, in Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin's understated phrase, "deep concern." Although a relatively small number of grants have been cut so far, all of them face uncertainty, and delayed decisions on future grants only add to the uncertainty. The effects could extend well beyond the lab.

The *On Wisconsin* team chose this issue's cover subject with several purposes in mind. One is obvious: we think that Immuto Scientific has an interesting story. (See page 24.) Another is about timing: this year marks the centennial for the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, the organization that manages UW–Madison's intellectual property. WARF helps get discoveries out of the lab and into the hands of people who can use them. It's been part of some of the UW's biggest research successes: vitamin D enrichment, warfarin, the UW Solution for organ transplants, and more. Those discoveries and inventions have helped millions of people, and they've proven lucrative, providing funding for more UW research.

But Immuto's story also illustrates one aspect of the importance of UW–Madison's research enterprise. Immuto has a product that could revolutionize drug development, and it aims to create its own drugs — including a treatment for a deadly blood cancer. But the company didn't just form out of good ideas and a savvy business plan. It was helped along by federally funded research.

Immuto's leaders are Faraz Choudhury PhD'17 and Daniel Benjamin '16, MS'17, PhD'21, and its technology grew out of work they did with Michael Sussman. Sussman's lab receives funding from the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation. Immuto itself received a National Institutes of Health SEED program grant. Federal research funding helped Badger scientists conduct the studies that underlie Immuto, long before anyone knew that those studies might lead to patentable discoveries or that those discoveries might prove profitable. Private companies are unlikely to provide funding for early discovery work — it seldom leads to a financial return. Federal funding helps scientists do the work of discovery that businesses will build on later.

UW–Madison is one of the world's leading research universities, and federal funding is vital to its work. That funding is under threat, and it's crucial to realize what's at stake. You'll be seeing more about the UW's research work in coming issues. If you'd like more frequent updates, visit news.wisc.edu/research-impact, and if you want to see five ways you can help protect UW research, see uwalumni.com/news/how-to-fight-for-the-uws-future.

JOHN ALLEN

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Dan Evans '01
Class of '01
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OnCampus

News from UW-Madison



JEFF MILLER

Country Doctor

A new UW program is helping Wisconsin address rural health care shortages.

Shane Hoffman '18, MD'25 can see the future he wants clearly: he's a surgeon at a clinic or small hospital in rural Wisconsin — perhaps somewhere in the far northern part of the state, where his family has deep roots. His medical practice will allow residents to access care quickly and stay closer to their homes and families.

"Hospitals are going under because they can't attract people to these rural communities," says Hoffman, who grew up near Lake Mills, Wisconsin. "I want to live in a small town or in the country. It's where I feel most at home."

In May, Hoffman became the first graduate of a program at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health that reduces the time it takes to train doctors who are interested in serving rural parts of the state. Students in the accelerated program take all the same required courses but graduate in three years instead of four.

"There's a significant geographic disconnect in Wisconsin between where people live and where doctors practice," says **Joseph Holt '91**, director of the UW's rural medicine program. "As many as 31 percent of the state's residents live in rural areas, yet only one in 10 physicians practice in these rural areas. It's imperative that we address this problem, because the rural physician shortage is only going to increase as current physicians retire and the population ages."

The goal of the accelerated program is to instill in graduates a desire to practice in rural Wisconsin — there are no contracts or other requirements. Hoffman's clinical rotations as a medical school student took him to rural areas all over the state. What he witnessed only increased his resolve to practice rural medicine.

"It makes me sad to walk through an empty hospital wing," Hoffman says. "People are being shipped to bigger cities because of staff shortages in these rural areas."

DOUG ERICKSON

In May, Shane Hoffman became the first person to graduate from the UW's accelerated program for training rural physicians.



JAIME ESPINOZA

AI REFERRALS CAN REDUCE OPIOID ADDICTION

In a recent UW study, an AI screening tool successfully identified hospitalized adults at risk for opioid use disorder and recommended referral to inpatient addiction specialists.

The AI method was just as effective as a health provider in initiating addiction-specialist consultations and recommending monitoring of opioid withdrawal.

Compared to patients who received provider-initiated consultations, patients identified for addiction medicine referrals by AI screening had 47 percent lower odds of being readmitted to the hospital within 30 days after their initial discharge. This reduction in readmissions translated to a total of nearly \$109,000 in estimated health care savings during the study period.

The study was led by **Majid Afshar**, an associate professor in the Department of Medicine at the UW's School of Medicine and Public Health.

According to Afshar, the study suggests that investment in AI may be a promising strategy for health care systems seeking to increase access to addiction treatment while improving efficiencies and saving money.

"Our study represents one of the first demonstrations of an AI screening tool embedded into addiction medicine and hospital workflows, highlighting the pragmatism and real-world promise of this approach," he says.

ANDREW HELLPAF



Life of Slice

Rocky Rococo introduced generations of Badgers to rectangular pizza.

A chapter of Madison history came to a close last December when Roger Brown, one of the founders of Rocky Rococo Pizza, sold his last restaurant. This wasn't the pan-style pizza joint most Badgers will remember — it was on Madison's Beltline highway. But it was a last tie to a pizza tradition that began at 411 W. Gilman, just off State Street.

You may be thinking, "I remember Rocky Rococo, and it wasn't there. It was at ..." Well, let your gluten relax a moment. The Rocky's story is, if not rococo, certainly baroque.

In April 1974, Brown and his partner, Wayne Mosley, opened

the first Rocky's in the site of what had been Floyd Brown's Restaurant (no relation to Roger). Rocky's offered up three varieties of pizza — pepperoni, sausage, and mushroom — cut into rectangles and served in foil packets. (The iconic Rocky's "This Box Rocks" cardboard container didn't appear until 1976.) That fall, it won the *Daily Cardinal's* annual pizza contest, knocking off such favorites as Gino's, Gargano's, and Pizza Pit. "Rocky Rococo's victory was insured [sic] by a combination of a moist-deep crust and good spicing," said the review.

The little pizza place slowly built toward success. In August 1975, it opened a second location at 651 State Street. Then came pizzerias in La Crosse, Minneapolis, and farther afield. By 1990, Rocky's had 10 locations in Mad-

The original Rocky Rococo pizzeria opened in April 1974 on West Gilman Street, in a building as rectangular as its signature slice.

ison and dozens more around the country.

But pizza is a competitive business in Madison, and Rocky's might have loaded a few too many pepperonis onto its slice of the market. By 2000, nine of those 10 locations had closed, including Gilman and State. Of course, three more had opened, the one nearest campus located at 1301 Regent Street. That location is now Fabiola's Spaghetti House. The building that housed 651 State has been swallowed up by the sportswear shop Insignia. And since 2009, the West Gilman location has been home to Fugu Asian Fusion.

If you're back in town and get a hankering for the Rocky's deep dish you remember from your student days, don't fear: Madison still has three locations, and they deliver.

JOHN ALLEN



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Five Ways UW Satellite Technology Saves Lives

Badger meteorologists use high-tech tools to keep Americans safe.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison may be the birthplace of satellite meteorology, but scientists on campus have never stopped developing new ways for space-based instruments to protect and improve the lives of people back on Earth.

For more than 40 years, researchers at the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies (CIMSS) — a partnership between UW–Madison and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) — have been working to turn satellite data into faster and more accurate weather forecasts. They are protecting you and your community in ways you may not expect.

“Technology is constantly advancing, improving our ability to observe our surroundings and enhancing our lives,” says **Tristan L’Ecuyer**, CIMSS director and a satellite researcher. “The innovative research we do here plays a critical role in delivering essential satellite products that support NOAA’s mission to improve public safety and well-being and effectively manage our nation’s resources.”

Here are just a few of the most recent ways CIMSS has made Americans safer:

- **AI-assisted hurricane prediction:** Used by agencies worldwide, CIMSS algorithms add speed and accuracy to assessments of hurricanes that can abruptly grow stronger and shift their tracks.
- **Dodging lightning:** A CIMSS-built tool called ProbSevere employs AI to sharpen severe weather predictions, shortening the wait for forecasts that protect people and their property from lightning, heavy rain, hail, and tornadoes.
- **Fighting wildfires:** The CIMSS-designed Next Generation Fire System provides highly accurate, real-time information on a wild-fire’s location, movement, size, and intensity.
- **Protecting against floods:** The National Weather Service uses a mapping tool developed at CIMSS to quickly provide situational awareness of changing conditions and flood risks.
- **Smoother and safer airplane flights:** Researchers working on the CIMSS Turbulence Product use AI to help pilots avoid the atmospheric conditions that make flights uncomfortably bumpy — or worse.

CHRIS BARNCARD



JEFF MILLER

Occasionally, an 1887 building needs an upgrade.

The UW plans to renovate iconic Science Hall, adding a rear atrium and replacing the roof, among other improvements. No word on whether the building’s legendary ghosts will be allowed to remain on site during construction.



BRUCE RICHTER

In 247Sports’s ranking of college-football game day traditions, Virginia Tech’s “Enter Sandman” entrance theme came in number one, with UW–Madison’s “Jump Around” at number two. While we’d quibble with the order, it’s undeniable that, as 247Sports reports, the “Jump Around” pandemonium “often registers on seismic scales.”

The State of Wisconsin passed a two-year budget that includes a \$256 million increase for the Universities of Wisconsin — the largest funding increase for the UW system in more than 20 years. The budget provides funds for UW–Madison to expand dining halls; to plan for the demolition of the Humanities Building and relocation of the departments housed there; and to attract faculty in high-demand fields of study, among other priorities.

Enrollment Booms

UW student population trends have followed inflection points in American life.

In fall 2023, UW-Madison's student enrollment topped 50,000 for the first time. The milestone was the result of the university's steady, strategic growth over the past decade, accompanied by a record-setting number of student applications.

In short: people are interested in the UW, and the university is content to meet the demand.

Historically, however, the UW's enrollment trends have not always been dictated by

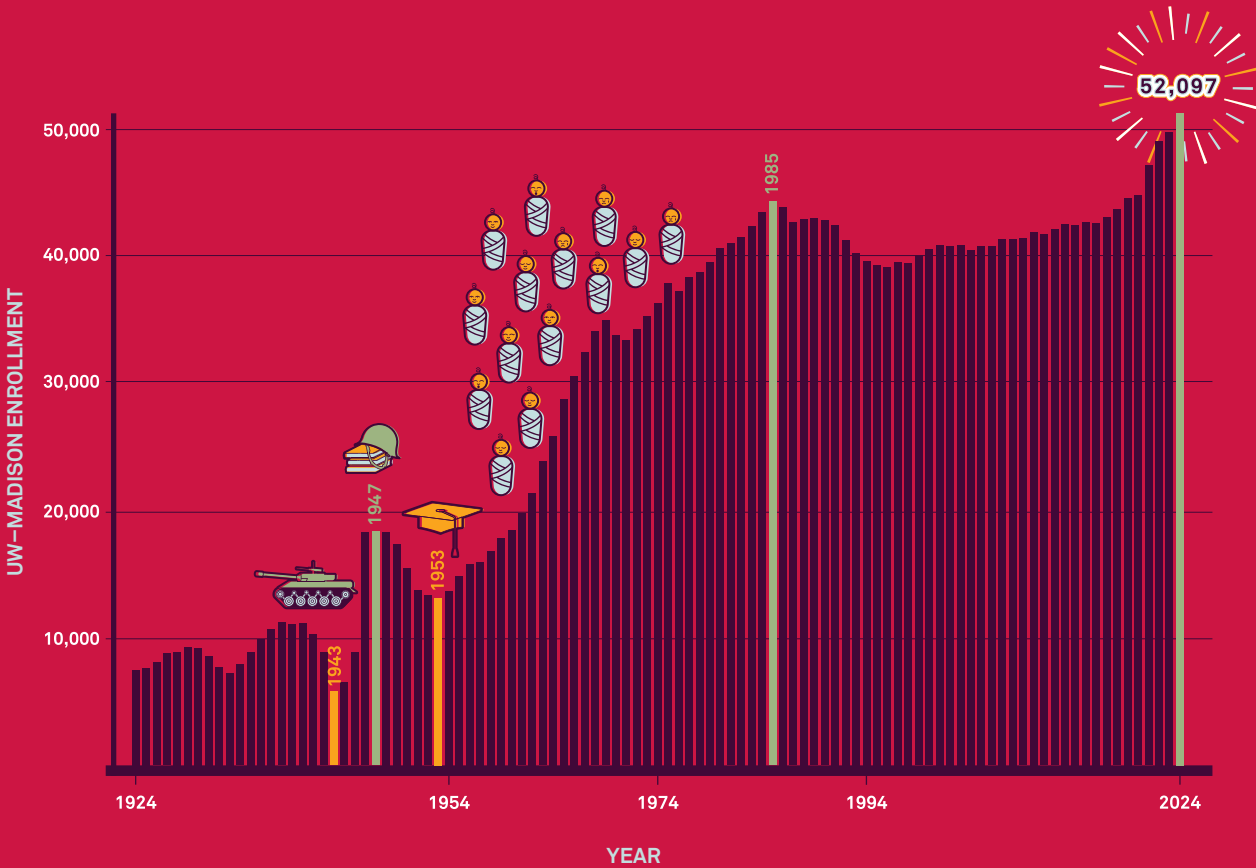
institutional priority. A survey of enrollment reports over the past 100 years shows periods of growth and decline that closely trace the course of American history.

As the U.S. entered World War II, the UW discharged its scholars to the front lines, halving the student population from 11,376 in 1940 to 5,904 in 1943. After the war, with veterans gaining access to college from the GI Bill, enrollment doubled in 1946 to a then-record 18,598

students. The UW built Quonset huts on Library Mall to meet the sudden lodging demands.

After the GIs graduated, the UW's enrollment stabilized until their children, the Baby Boomers, came of age. Between 1960 and 1985, the student population soared from 18,811 to 45,050. The result of that growth was the massive, southwest expansion of the physical campus from which UW students still benefit today. Thanks, Boomers.

PRESTON SCHMITT '14



A New Approach to Student Success

UW-Madison's organizational changes aim to boost support for all undergraduates.

In July, Chancellor **Jennifer L. Mnookin** announced a series of administrative changes to improve how UW-Madison supports all undergraduate students through centralized programs and resources.

Last fall, Mnookin asked former provost Charles Isbell to lead a comprehensive review of the undergraduate experience and provide recommendations that would bolster retention and graduation rates. The resulting working group suggested enhancing support for students with financial need and first-generation students in particular; developing mechanisms for providing data-driven student support across the undergraduate population; and streamlining campuswide assistance to help students more easily navigate available resources.

Accepting these recommendations, Mnookin has directed campus to reorganize student assistance along three functional lines. Efforts related to student well-being, involvement, and belonging will be centralized within Student Affairs. Academic support resources will be housed within the Division for Teaching and Learning. And initiatives around financial support will be run by the Office of Student Financial Aid.

In addition, a new office focused on serving first-generation students and students with financial need will open within Student Affairs during the upcoming academic year. Support services for both groups of students were previously dispersed across multiple units on campus.

As a result of this consolidation, the university is sunsetting the Division of Diversity, Equity & Educational Achievement (DDEEA) as a freestanding unit. DDEEA's portfolio — which includes scholarship-linked student assistance, employee support, and institutional data collection — will be relocated by function to the Division of Teaching and Learning, the Office of Human Resources, and the Data, Academic Planning & Institutional Research unit.

"I believe these changes will allow us to serve many more students with an even greater array of resources," Mnookin said.

She noted that the university will continue to support the scholarships and programs formerly administered by DDEEA, including the PEOPLE, Posse, and First Wave cohorts. The same is true for campus's student cultural centers, residential learning communities, and events that promote cross-cultural exchange and learning.

"Diversity of all kinds, including both diversity of viewpoint and diversity of identity and background, remains a core value of our university," Mnookin said. "We must create the conditions here, including through programs and support services, that allow all of our students, faculty, and staff to flourish and to reach their full potential.

"Fostering cross-cultural competency among our students will prepare them to thrive in our complex world. Creating opportunities for respectful dialogue across our differences of background and beliefs, and building a shared appreciation for our pluralistic society, are our imperative."

PRESTON SCHMITT '14

"Creating opportunities for respectful dialogue across our differences of background and beliefs, and building a shared appreciation for our pluralistic society, are our imperative."



UW ATHLETICS

In 2024–25, the Badger women's hockey team had one of its biggest seasons ever in LaBahn Arena, with an average of 1,656 ticket scans for home games. And it's hard to imagine many of those ticketholders left disappointed, given that the team went undefeated at home and won its eighth national title with the program's best record, 38–1–2.



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

The late UW-Madison professor **Truman Lowe MFA'73** will be honored with his first major retrospective, opening on October 24 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. *Water's Edge: The Art of Truman Lowe* will feature the Ho-Chunk artist's drawings and sculptures. Above: Lowe's Effigy: *Bird Form* on the UW campus.

Along with the number one ranking for the School of Education (see page 21), other top-ranked UW-Madison graduate programs in the latest list from U.S. News & World Report include rehabilitation counseling (first), speech-language pathology (third), veterinary medicine (fifth), psychology (eighth), occupational therapy (ninth), and sociology (ninth).



From Trash Can to Treasure

Katie Hudnall makes fantastical sculptures out of found wood.

Imagine an 11-foot-tall wooden object on three legs with a little pincer way up on top — what artist **Katie Hudnall** calls a sort of “demented coat rack.” When the viewer pulls a lever, the pincer opens, allowing a maple seed to gracefully whirl to the ground, helicopter-like.

This singular experience awaits visitors to *The Longest Distance between Two Points*, Hudnall’s current show at Philadelphia’s Museum for Art in Wood. The director of UW–Madison’s renowned woodworking and furniture program encourages us to interact with her work — and hopefully to undergo a transformation.

“The sculpture is trying to get

people to recognize the value in stopping for two or three seconds and just enjoying the movement of this seed, this brilliant evolutionary tool,” Hudnall says. “It’s easy for us to do that when we’re kids, but it’s harder as an adult. Everybody just feels too busy to pay attention to how beautiful the world still is.”

Hudnall recently got a shout-out in a *New York Times* article about the increasing prominence of women in the woodworking field. In 2020, she took over as head of the UW’s program — what she calls “a dream job.” She likes to start her students with a project called “Not a Spoon,” in which they can construct a piece of wooden tableware that goes beyond all known boundaries.

In her own work, Hudnall creates boxes, tool-like pieces, and furniture-like sculptures that tend to move. They have drawers, doors, and handles — the trappings of utilitarian objects — but often function in unexpected ways.

Hudnall encourages us to interact with her work — and hopefully to undergo a transformation.



For video of Katie Hudnall working on her unique sculptures, scan the QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/hudnall.



TAYLOR WOLFRAM/MADISON MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

“They do something that we don’t usually ask our furniture to do,” she says.

Hudnall still draws inspiration from her childhood passions: illustrations by Shel Silverstein and Edward Gorey and the absurd contraptions from the TV show *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*. She often begins a piece by sketching intriguing mechanisms she’d like to make. She’ll spend hundreds of hours on the bigger sculptures, assembling multiple pieces with thousands of screws.

As for materials, you won’t find Hudnall buying wood from a store. Instead, she recovers it from dumpsters, construction sites, and curbs.

“I love knowing that if I walk past a trash can, and it’s got a bunch of wood sticking out of it, I could rescue that material from the garbage stream and turn it into something beautiful,” she says. “It makes me feel like a magician.”

DEAN ROBBINS



PAUL L. NEWBY II

Inventing the Future

With help from industry partners, the Tech Exploration Lab devises innovative solutions to real-world problems.

Housed at the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, the Tech Exploration Lab focuses on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, Internet of Things, machine learning, and robotics. Students work on innovative projects under the guidance of alumni and industry partners who offer mentorship and resources (see photo above). Among them: creating an app that assists Alzheimer's caregivers and refining the user experience on Airbnb's website.

Launched last semester, the Tech Exploration Lab is a cross-campus collaboration led by the Wisconsin School of Business and the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery. Its 14 industry mentors are UW alumni from leading firms in retail, tech, and venture capital, including Salesforce and Amazon.

"We believe the best learning happens when students engage with real problems from industry," says **Sandra Bradley MS'90**, the lab's executive director. "Our mentors and partner companies are the driving force behind that experience. By bringing their toughest challenges into the lab, companies not only give students an invaluable opportunity to experiment, but they also gain something just as powerful: fresh thinking, rapid prototyping, and insights that can directly advance their own innovation efforts in a low-risk environment."

For Cub Foods CIO **Luke Anderson '98**, mentoring students is a way to support the next generation of innovators.

"The Tech Exploration Lab has been a great resource for us to explore how AI can benefit our business, without the high risk that usually comes with early experimentation," he says. "Through our engagement with the lab, we've been able to surface fresh ideas from talented students, test potential applications in a low-stakes environment, and get clearer insights into where AI could drive real value for our operations."

Kurt Kober MBA'07, an entrepreneur and the former division president of the Honest Company, worked with a student team that developed an AI model to monitor changes in skin health.

"I came into the Tech Exploration Lab to mentor students, but I walked away with something I didn't expect: momentum," Kober says. "The lab's interdisciplinary, experimental spirit gave me the space — and the spark — to test an idea I'd been quietly incubating in the wellness space. Sometimes, the best breakthroughs happen when curiosity, collaboration, and a little Badger grit collide."

CLARE BECKER

A BETTER WAY TO AGE IN PLACE

UW researchers are using augmented reality to make the homes of older adults safer. The Augmented Reality Home Assessment Tool, currently in prototype form, takes users through a step-by-step process that measures relevant parts of a living space and offers suggestions to make it more accessible.

A user is prompted to choose from 14 common functional limitations — visual impairment, poor balance, wheelchair use, and so on — and select the areas of the home to evaluate. Follow-up questions and prompts for measurements are tailored to the user's answers.

The tool then uses a LiDAR scanner — technology built into every iPhone and iPad Pro since 2020 — to measure elements in the home. By superimposing visuals in the space as seen through the device's camera, it will instantly let users know if something is an accessibility barrier.

At the end of the assessment, the tool generates a detailed report, including suggested design solutions.

Using the tool is faster and more accurate than taking manual measurements, according to the team's research. It's also much easier to use, and people involved in the testing felt much more confident about their measurements.

The project team was led by professors **Jung-hye Shin** and **Kevin Ponto '04** of the School of Human Ecology and **Beth Fields**, an associate professor in the kinesiology department. They hope the tool will be available through the Apple app store.

"The fact that you can use your phone and do all of those measurements digitally versus manually will be such a time saver and a cost saver for health care agencies and systems, because you're going to be able to be more efficient," Fields says.

HANNAH BLACK

MAKING GOOD ON BUCKY'S TUITION PROMISE

A flagship financial aid program at UW–Madison that provides generous support to in-state students from low- to moderate-income families increases student retention by several percentage points, according to new research.

The study, scheduled for publication in the *Peabody Journal of Education*, is the first to assess the long-term outcomes of Bucky's Tuition Promise, which began in 2018.

Bucky's Tuition Promise guarantees four years of tuition and segregated fees for any incoming freshman from Wisconsin whose family's annual household adjusted gross income is \$65,000 or less. Transfer students can qualify for up to two years.

Prior research has shown that being eligible for Bucky's Tuition Promise increases the probability that a lower-income student from Wisconsin will accept an enrollment offer from UW–Madison. The new study looks at what happens to the students once they arrive on campus.

"We wanted to make sure that this program wasn't just bringing students to campus but that those students went on to have successful college careers here," says **Amberly Dziesinski**, the study's author and a research analyst in the UW's Student Success through Applied Research Lab.

Comparing students closest to either side of the income eligibility threshold, Dziesinski found that the retention rate going into the second year for Bucky's Tuition Promise students close to the eligibility threshold was 96.6 percent, compared to 93.4 percent for the control group of ineligible students.

The difference of three percentage points is significant, she says, because the UW's retention rates are already very high across the board.

DOUG ERICKSON



COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

UW Students Engineer Their Own Beer

The fermentation lab brewed an extra-special bitter.

This spring, seniors in the UW Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering (CBE) fermentation lab tapped the expertise of local brewmasters to complete their midterm assignment: designing and brewing a specialty beer.

Brewing combines many of the skills and lessons the students have been learning throughout their college career, as the process itself is a complex interplay of chemical transformations. Prior to full-scale brewing, students conducted experiments to examine the impact of temperature variations on mashing and the effects of water chemistry — including pH and mineral content — on the final product.

"It was impressive how quickly the students got comfortable with the brewing process," says **Brendan Blackwell**, a CBE faculty member who led the lab. "After one practice brew, they confidently took ownership, wrote creative recipes, and produced some good beer."

With guidance from **Kevin Zerman** (above), president of Wisconsin Brewing Company in Verona, Wisconsin, students developed recipes for six extra-special bitters: beers that balance bitterness with a sweet malt flavor and that were chosen for their compatibility with the characteristics of Madison's hard water.

The students brewed their extra-special bitters in the College of Engineering's John C. Kuetemeyer Instructional Laboratories, and the final products were evaluated by a panel of local brewmasters and experts. The winning recipe — Smooth Criminal, developed by **Michael Maggiacomo x'25** and **Jackson Puent x'26** — was brewed at five-barrel scale at the Lake Louie brewery in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, and served in their Verona taproom.

"Participating in the fermentation lab in the CBE curriculum was a surreal experience," Maggiacomo says. "I learned just how controlled the brewing process has to be, and just how much altering temperature and hops properties affects the taste and aroma of the final product."

CLAIRE MASSEY '19



JAMIE ESPINOZA

And the Squeak Goes On

Scientists search for a better cheese curd.

As many Wisconsinites will assert, a cheese curd is not truly fresh unless it squeaks.

Curds typically lose their signature squeak within a few days to a couple of weeks, depending on how they're stored and served. That's why a UW Center for Dairy Research team, led by scientist **Rani Govindasamy-Lucey**, is looking to extend the shelf life of the squeak that consumers have come to expect.

The researchers collaborated with the UW's Speech Processing and Auditory Neuroscience Lab to develop a method for measuring the acoustic properties of cheese squeaks. They then trained sensory panel participants to characterize squeakiness.

The team suspected that acidification caused by starter cultures may quickly weaken the protein structure of curds and eliminate their squeak. Another process, called proteolysis, was also thought to weaken the protein matrix through the actions of native milk enzymes and residual rennet (an enzyme used in cheesemaking).

So the team took inspiration from a Finnish cheese that has a long-lasting squeak — juustoleipä, sometimes called "bread cheese."

"Juustoleipä does not include any form of acidification, and it's baked at high temps after it's made," says recent food science graduate **Maggie Becher PhD'24**, who helped lead the study.

But juustoleipä can still be susceptible to proteolysis, so the team focused on the potential relation of that process to squeakiness. Their analysis of juustoleipä curds found that proteolysis increased during storage, but it occurred much more slowly in samples that were baked at high temperatures. The team also found that increases in proteolysis detracted from measured squeakiness levels.

"Now we know how to quantify squeakiness, and we understand what causes the loss of squeakiness," Govindasamy-Lucey says. "This is valuable data for cheese manufacturers looking to keep consumers happy with squeaky cheese that lasts longer."

NIK HAWKINS '01, MS'05



DANIELLE LAMRY

Coming into his final attempt in the shot put at June's NCAA Outdoor Championships, UW track and field star **Jason Swarens '25** was in fourth place and knew he needed a huge throw. And that's just what he delivered, winning the national title. In his final season, Swarens took his place as a UW–Madison great, setting school records in both the indoor and outdoor shot put.

“As you go through life, do not deprive yourself of the experience of joy. Spend your time with people who give you happiness. Stay as open to new experiences as you are today. Find satisfaction in small routines — the place where you live, community service, time outside in the natural world.”

— Wall Street Journal columnist **Jason Gay '92** at spring commencement

THE GREENING OF UW-MADISON

Students at UW-Madison are often quick to notice opportunities to improve the sustainability of campus facilities. However, many don't have the resources to solve the problem on their own. That's why the UW Office of Sustainability created the Green Fund program, which supports student-initiated environmental projects.

Students bring their proposals to the Green Fund staff, who help them collect data, write funding proposals, implement a project, and report on the outcomes. Since launching in 2017, it has supported such initiatives as installing bird-safe windows around campus, reducing waste in dining halls, and installing a BCycle station at the Arboretum Visitor Center.

In the last academic year, the Green Fund received 15 applications, the highest number ever.

"We approve most applications we receive," says program manager **Ian Aley MS'17**. "If an idea isn't ready right away, we offer feedback and continue to support the student team until it's ready for approval."

In 2022, the UW grounds crew approached Office of Sustainability staff about replacing seven of their fossil-fuel-powered riding lawn mowers with electric ones. The Green Fund staff invited the student group Campus Leaders for Energy Action Now (CLEAN) to collaborate on the project.

Aley helped the CLEAN students calculate the cost savings and carbon impact of the conversion to electric. They also conducted interviews with the mower operators to learn about their process. The result: swapping out the diesel and gas mowers for electric models.

The data collected by the students will inform future electrification efforts on campus.

ABIGAIL BURES X'27

A PHD IN SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

In 1908, the University of Wisconsin established the country's first Department of Agricultural Communications in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Today, that department — known since 2000 as the Department of Life Sciences Communication (LSC) — has launched the world's first doctorate in science communication. The inaugural cohort began this fall.

"More than ever, it's clear that we need young professionals who are equipped with the skill and knowledge to address issues that are at the intersection of science and society," says **Dominique Brossard**, professor and former chair of LSC.

Previously, LSC coadministered a joint PhD program with the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. As prospective students expressed increasingly specialized interests in the respective departments, it became clear that there was a demand for equally specialized degrees, and LSC was well prepared to offer one.

According to Brossard, the new program is unique not only in being the first and only one in the country to offer the recognition of a doctorate in science communication, but also in its comprehensive curriculum. In addition to learning from and working alongside LSC faculty — the most-cited scholars of science communication in the country — students take courses within the scientific subfields in which they hope to specialize.

"One of the beauties of the program is the flexibility that students have to build a program that fits their ambitions," Brossard says. "When they go in the job market, they're not competing against each other because they all have something different to bring to the table."

MEGAN PROVOST '20



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

The Right Tool for the Job

For a procedure in the UW's Microsurgery and Regenerative Medicine Lab, **Emily Zona MDx'26** goes eyeball-to-eyeball with **Weifeng Zeng**, the director of microsurgery education for the UW's School of Medicine and Public Health. Their surgical microscope is used for both scientific research and surgical training, enabling highly precise procedures such as kidney and liver transplantation, limb transplantation, and nerve and artery repair. Talk about a cool tool.

Finding Creative Solutions in Community

Dean Marcelle Haddix leads the UW School of Education with an example of excellence and an ethos of care.

All-school gatherings, a weekly email to faculty and staff, “Coffee with the Dean” — the changes **Marcelle Haddix** has made since stepping into the role of dean at the UW’s School of Education last August have been small but meaningful.

“I just got this new table because the old one was smaller, and I need a table where more people can sit,” Haddix says. “You can imagine six people sitting around the table, taking on a challenging task or issue, and problem-solving and coming up with creative solutions together.”

This vision is one of many that Haddix has for the school, which is ranked number one in the country and houses highly regarded programs across the arts, health, and education. Inheriting a top-tier institution is an honor and an immense responsibility. Haddix embraces both as opportunities to effect positive change.

“I’m more concerned with us having a number

one impact,” Haddix says. “How are we addressing the number one issues in our society?”

It’s a question that recalls the Wisconsin Idea: ensuring that the school reaches the people it exists to serve. As a self-described “community-engaged scholar,” Haddix knows that the task of answering that question starts with collaboration.

Talk about the importance of community in your work.

Community engagement has been my anchor and my philosophy in my scholarship, my teaching, and service. ... Everything that we do, every decision that we make, should be done in community.

What are some of the “number one issues” the school is working to address?

One of the areas that we’ve been thinking a lot about is how best to enhance human health and

Haddix wants to “enhance quality of life for all members of society.”

quality of life for all members of society. We’re also thinking about mental health and well-being, especially as it relates to young people in schools. We are thinking about literacy here in the state of Wisconsin and how we address the disparities within literacy learning and education in early childhood. We’re also thinking about the teacher workforce. We have the Teacher Pledge, which is an initiative to address the teacher shortage in the state. And we’re thinking about access: what can we do in terms of creating pathways for young people from across the state to have access to education?

You’ve previously practiced as a certified reproductive health doula and yoga instructor. Have these experiences informed your approach to leadership?

What I have from those experiences is an ethos of care. You’re paying attention to people’s lived experiences in the moment. You have to be watchful, you have to have empathy, you have to show care. Those behaviors just naturally become the things that I draw on to be an effective leader.

Which of your roles do you find most rewarding?

I think the role of “leader” in this season of my life is very rewarding. To know that I’m working with really smart people ... who feel fulfilled and who wake up every day excited to tackle hard things in service to young people, in service to our community, and in service to future generations. We’re making a change. We are doing transformative work.

Interview by Megan Provost '20
Photo by Althea Dotzour



Fast Times at UW-Madison

The men's cross-country team is on an extraordinary winning streak.

The UW men's cross-country team is used to leaving the Big Ten competition in the dust.

The Badgers have won seven straight conference championships. They've captured 14 titles in the 17 years that **Mick Byrne** has been at the helm, making him the winningest cross-country coach in Big Ten history. Last season, to no one's surprise, Byrne was named the Big Ten men's cross-country Coach of the Year — for the 15th time.

Cross country has been a Big Ten sport since the conference formed more than a century ago, and all told, the men's squad has tallied an astounding 57 Big Ten championships, five NCAA championships, and 38 top-10 finishes at the nationals, including a fourth-place spot last season. Four UW runners have won individual national championships: **Walter Mehl '40, MPH'46, PhD'51** in 1939, **Tim Hacker '86, MS'91, PhD'96** in 1985, **Simon Bairu '07** in 2004 and 2005, and **Morgan McDonald '19** in 2018.

Can we assume that this perpetually winning team will win again in the 2025 season, which runs from September through November? While no one would count them out, there are obstacles on this year's path to the finish line.

For one, the West Coast schools that joined the Big Ten in the 2024-25 season offer stiff competition, with Oregon looking particularly strong. For another, all-time Badger great **Bob Liking '25** has graduated.

Liking won four Big Ten men's cross-country titles, becoming only the fourth athlete to accomplish that feat. Last season, he set a Big Ten record of 22 minutes, 47.3 seconds for an eight-kilometer race, breaking the previous record by nearly 25 seconds.

How do you follow a Bob Liking? According to Coach Byrne, it's by "finding another Bob Liking." Success breeds success, and runners from around the world are eager to join the UW program. Byrne has recruited several heirs apparent who turned in strong showings

last season, including **Christian de Vaal x'27, Matan Ivri x'28, Johnny Livingstone x'27, Liam Newhart x'28, and Micah Wilson x'27.**

"We have some good young guys who've served their apprenticeship under Bob's leadership," Byrne says. "And now they're ready to step into the leadership role themselves."

Last season, de Vaal finished seventh at the Big Ten championships, and he benefited from Liking's example. "Bob was someone I looked up to for being so professional in his approach to training," says de Vaal, who came to UW-Madison from Auckland, New Zealand. "I'd like to serve that function for the new guys on the team."

Distance runners require a special kind of grit. They train year-round and participate in three sports: cross country,



indoor track, and outdoor track. A crucial skill, according to Byrne, is patience.

"It's all about trusting the system and not rushing the system," he says. "In our sport, long and steady is a lot better than just hammering all the time and wanting those quick results."

Raised in Ireland, Byrne came to the UW in 2008 after excelling as a distance runner at Rhode Island's Providence College and as a coach at New York's Iona College. He's the director of track and field and cross country, overseeing both the men's and women's programs. This is a guy who's nurtured six Olympians and 12 NCAA individual champions, along with bringing home the 2011 NCAA championship in men's cross country — an achievement that earned him national Coach of the Year honors. He maintains his pas-

sion for the work despite the long hours and incessant travel of a three-season sport.

Above all, Byrne sees himself as a teacher. He spent 13 years as an educator in New York City, developing his empathy and listening skills. Understanding that a coach can't control a race, he teaches his runners how to take control themselves.

"I always say, 'I don't know how this race is going to go. I can give you a couple of scenarios.' And we try to have a plan for each of those scenarios. But I prefer to teach our athletes to trust their instincts. Great athletes always have great instincts, and I give them the freedom to make choices in a race."

A special kind of grit (left to right): Rowen Ellenberg '24, MS'25; Christian de Vaal x'27; and Bob Liking '25.

The close-knit cross-country team gets a boost from the Badger faithful who cheer on runners at the Thomas Zimmer Championship Course. The UW's home field, which last year hosted the NCAA championships, is renowned as spectator-friendly. The inner and outer loops allow everyone to see a race develop — a thrill for both the UW athletes and fans.


What makes UW men's cross country so extraordinary, year after year? Byrne points to the program's storied past and sums it up in a single word: pride. The runners, he says, love putting on the UW-Madison uniform.

"There's a 50-year Badger legacy that we're carrying on," notes de Vaal. "If that doesn't give you motivation, I don't know what will."

BY DEAN ROBBINS

PHOTO BY ALTHEA DOTZOUR





*Faraz Choudhury
is CEO of Immuto
Scientific, a com-
pany he cofound-
ed with fellow UW
researchers.*



WARF Seeks the UW's Next Big Thing

A century ago, campus leaders established the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation to take UW inventions public through patents and licensing, returning funds to the university to further research. Recently, the organization has added a new line of business: foster start-ups and generate revenue through venture capital.

BY JOHN ALLEN

PHOTOS BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24

Faraz Choudhury PhD'17 arrived at UW–Madison seeking a problem to solve. And not a small problem, either.

Choudhury wanted to be an entrepreneur. He didn't just want to be his own boss, but rather to launch the sort of company that would attract venture capitalists (VCs), one that would be a Very Big Deal.

"Starting a company, you need something that is very groundbreaking, very revolutionary," he says. "VCs will tell you, don't make anything that's marginally better than what you have available today. A VC-backed company would have to have exponential growth. You need to 10X their investment."

Choudhury thought he was in the right field for that: electrical and computer engineering. As a grad student, he worked in the lab of Professor Leon Shohet, along with Daniel Benjamin '16, MS'17, PhD'21 and Josh Blatz MS'18, PhD'21. They were using plasma to make microchips better, faster, and more powerful. Computer chips are a promising line of work — they're vital to the booming AI industry. And Choudhury was willing to be patient.

"I didn't think entrepreneurship would happen right away," he says. "I thought I'd go to work for IBM or Intel — I had a job offer from Intel. I'd work there a few years and then eventually start my own company." He figured Silicon Valley was where he would find his Very Big Idea and venture capital backers.

But in 2016, opportunity walked into the lab in the person of Michael Sussman, a professor of biochemistry. Sussman and his chief scientist, Ben Minkoff, were interested in plasma but not in making computer chips. They wanted to use it to study the structure of proteins. Proteins are one of the keys to disease. Viruses, bacteria, cancerous cells — all have characteristic proteins.

The Shohet lab found a way to help Sussman — a process called Plasma-Induced Modification of Biomolecules, or PLIMB. It was a revolutionary idea, one worth taking to the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) to have it patented. It was the kind of big idea Choudhury was looking for, and he and Benjamin — along with Shohet, Sussman, Minkoff, and Blatz — decided to launch a start-up company around PLIMB: Immuto Scientific.

Immuto appealed to WARF as much as, if not more than, patenting PLIMB itself. In recent years, WARF has been increasing its role as a venture capital investor for UW-connected start-ups. Immuto seemed like an ideal candidate for investment.

A Better Mousetrap

Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door. Ralph Waldo Emerson is supposed to have said that, or something like it, but you could be forgiven for thinking that it's WARF's motto. The foundation's purpose is to promote inventions. And its history is tied up in rodent removal.

Actually, WARF's motto is "partnering with University of Wisconsin research to solve the world's problems," which is more apt if less evocative.

The foundation began its life 100 years ago, in 1925, at the urging of Harry Steenbock, who wanted the university to control and benefit from the process he invented for enriching foods with vitamin D. WARF patented that process, and many other ideas. WARF's licenses bring in revenue through royalties, and WARF then returns funding to the university.

Last academic year, WARF's support for UW-Madison totaled \$159.8 million. One of its most successful patent licenses is for warfarin — not a better mousetrap, maybe, but a better rat poison. Warfarin was developed in the 1930s by biochemistry professor Karl Paul Link 1922, MS1923, PhD1925. Later, the chemical at the heart of warfarin was found to be a useful blood thinner to prevent strokes.

Erik Iverson, who has served as WARF's CEO since 2016, refers to warfarin as one of the university's "diamonds in the rough." (See sidebar.) It's one of the inventions that has provided an outsize return to WARF and to the UW.

Since Iverson came to Madison, he's been looking for ways to create more — and more profitable — diamonds.

"When I arrived at WARF, we had our IP [intellectual property — essentially, patent and licensing], which is our bread and butter, the soul of this organization," Iverson says. "But I was brought on to identify [ways of] both strengthening the licensing pipeline but also broadening out the sources of revenue."

By *broadening the sources of revenue*, Iverson means chiefly helping WARF grow into a venture capital investor that puts its money in — and earns significant returns from — UW-based start-ups. Under his leadership, WARF added several new divisions, including WARF Therapeutics, which does drug discovery; WARF Accelerator, which identifies potential start-ups and helps them build the skills and teams that will make them attractive to investors; and WARF Ventures, an in-house VC fund. His hope is to find not only new warfarins but also the companies that will produce and sell those warfarins.

"Warfarin, our namesake, is the most prescribed drug in history as a blood thinner," says Iverson. "Every successful tech transfer office in the country has a drug in its portfolio. WARF is no different."

Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door. But build a better drug, and the world will remunerate.

This is one reason why PLIMB and Immuto

Greg Keenan runs WARF Accelerator, which seeks to "de-risk" start-ups.



appealed to WARF. The process has a clear application in drug development. Previously, biochemists could find the structure of proteins only by crystallizing them and then looking at them under an electron microscope. The process is slow and expensive, and it takes proteins out of their natural state, which means the outcome is prone to failure.

“Crystallography takes over a year sometimes to get a single structure. It costs over \$100,000,” says Choudhury. “It’s been a big bottleneck in the pharmaceutical industry.”

PLIMB could accurately discover the structure of proteins in their native environment.

WARF saw the possibilities in PLIMB and Immuto right away — it was just the kind of company that WARF’s venture-capital group wanted to back.

De-Risking

To make the UW a player in the world of high-tech entrepreneurship takes more than invention. It takes money. Madison may not have the kind of investor money that New York or San Francisco or Boston can command, but with WARF, it offers a clear method for promoting technology transfer — business-speak for turning ideas into inventions and inventions into products. This is what attracted Iverson to Wisconsin. And it’s what brought Greg Keenan here, too.

Keenan, who heads WARF Accelerator, brought experience from Boston and Silicon Valley, where he had worked in technology start-ups. When he talks about what Accelerator does, the term he comes back to again and again is *de-risk*.

“We do technology de-risking and market de-risking,” he says. “And what’s exciting now, we’re starting to de-risk teams.”

Risk, of course, is central to venture capitalism — *venture* is just a synonym for *risky*. The popular image of venture capitalists is that they embrace high risk for the hope of large rewards. But in general, businesspeople — even VCs — don’t actually like risks nearly so much as they want rewards.

“It’s getting harder and harder to license technologies, because companies are becoming more risk-averse,” Keenan says. “They want to see more proof that these technologies work and can solve the problems they were trying to address.”

Accelerator tries to remove the most obvious kinds of risks.

Each month, WARF holds a roughly three-hour meeting to discuss the new technologies that UW researchers have developed. The university generates between 350 and 400 of these innovations each year, “about one a day,” says Keenan, “and our licensing team and our Accelerator team look at every one. It’s an awesome meeting, an energizing meeting, and a lot of fun.”

Sometimes, as with Immuto, members of the



research team want to take their invention to market. Keenan estimates that WARF will seek a patent for about half of the ideas that come in, and for between five and 10 a year, it backs a proposed start-up. Keenan’s Accelerator group keeps a “holding pen” of around 40 ideas that it’s evaluating — de-risking to see if they’re worth backing with venture capital.

What does de-risking entail? The first thing WARF wants to see is “commercialization potential” — does this idea or invention have a market?

“Most of the time, [what we see is] not even a product yet. It’s still just an early-stage technology, maybe an idea, maybe just a kind of lab bench experiment. Translating that into a business or a product is a much, much more challenging activity,” says Keenan. “Ideally, we’re starting with a problem and bringing a solution to that problem. But a lot of times, we have what we call technology searching for a problem. Those are the hardest to sell.”

If the idea does solve a real-world problem, the next question is whether that solution is unique. If existing technologies solve the same problem, then even a new and practical invention can fail in the marketplace.

The next step in de-risking is to prove that the idea or invention works. “Frequently, what we’re funding are prototypes, a field trial, a marketing study,” Keenan says. “We want to meet a milestone that is meaningful to business and industry.”

If a potential start-up can meet those requirements, Accelerator tries to de-risk the team — to ensure that the potential start-up has the necessary talents to be successful.

“Our biggest question is who’s going to run

Erik Iverson has led WARF since 2016. During his tenure, he has focused on finding “diamonds in the rough,” inventions with potential for high profit.



Mike Partsch heads WARF Ventures, the organization's venture capital fund.

this idea,” says Mike Partsch, who heads WARF Ventures. “The overwhelming majority of the time, the inventor of the technology is a professor on campus. They are a world-renowned scientist, very knowledgeable in their field, but they don’t know anything about running a company. So we need to recruit management talent from outside.”

Once a start-up satisfies Keenan’s Accelerator team, Partsch’s Ventures team will decide whether to invest WARF money. That investment would likely begin with between \$250,000 and \$500,000 of seed capital and might rise to as much as \$10 million over several rounds of fundraising.

But the funding is an investment and not a gift. Most start-ups fail, and as WARF is taking a risk, it expects a sizable reward. Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door. But mousetraps currently sell two for \$1.23 at Walmart, and that doesn’t give much room for profit. Venture capitalists want to see much higher potential.

“When we make a million-dollar investment, as a venture capitalist, we want to see a five- to 10-times return in seven to 10 years,” says Partsch. “We expect that investment to realistically be able to make multiples. If we saw an opportunity, and the entrepreneur said, ‘Oh, if you invest in us and we’re wildly successful, you could get a 25, 30 percent return,’ we’d be like, ‘No, not interested.’”

Immuto Scientific was one of the first companies to go through WARF Accelerator after Keenan arrived in 2017. “Our funding went in to help the cofounders build the first devices,” he says. Its idea appealed immediately to pharmaceutical companies, and Choudhury struck the WARF team as a strong CEO. WARF saw how quickly Immuto could turn technology into profit.

“The market is undeveloped for this technology, but it’s going to displace the X-ray crystallography market,” Partsch says. “It’s faster; it’s cheaper. It can grow the [drug] market, because companies will now use [Immuto] for every single drug candidate instead of just the 10 percent or so that they think have potential.”

The line from lab to profit seems clear for Immuto. But that’s not the primary direction in which Choudhury wants his company to go.

Successful Exit

Choudhury wants to solve big problems, and the thing about the plan that makes so much sense to Partsch and Keenan — the problems it shows such promise at solving — is that they’re limited. Speeding up drug development is a small problem.

“We knew right away that there was a service business here,” Choudhury says. “And we could make some money on services. But then we thought, how do we make this into a high-growth business? We’ve got to make drugs of our own with this platform.”

For three years, from 2018 until 2021, Choudhury and Benjamin and the Immuto team developed their ideas with WARF Accelerator. Then WARF Ventures put significant money into the company, and for the next two and a half years, Immuto built up its customer base among pharmaceutical firms.

For the team at WARF, Immuto is heading toward what venture capitalists call a “successful exit,” either a stock offering that invites broad public investment or the sale of the company to a bigger, established firm. Either will make all of the early investors rich.

But this isn't the kind of success Choudhury is hoping for, or at least not the only kind.

While the company was growing, Immuto was looking for an opportunity to solve a big problem — like curing cancer.

Cancer seemed like a prime area for PLIMB investigation because of its nature. Cancers are, essentially, protein problems.

“What happens in cancer is that a protein gets mutated in some way or it gets overexpressed,” says Choudhury. “Drug developers identify these proteins, and then they make drugs against them. But the same overexpressed protein exists in healthy tissues.”

Drug developers often run into problems creating cancer treatments in the lab, because they're only dealing with a protein drug target in a test tube. If the drug candidate destroys the protein and kills the tumor in a lab setting, it looks like a success. But put it in a live patient, and suddenly it's causing collateral damage. Now healthy tissues are suffering. Or worse, patients can die of the cure.

PLIMB enables researchers to find a drug that leaves the healthy protein alone. “We can design drugs to the structure of the protein that are only specific to the tumor,” Choudhury says. “When we test that same drug on the healthy tissues, it doesn't bind to that protein in the healthy tissues.”

Immuto's opportunity arrived in the form of acute myeloid leukemia, or AML, a cancer that affects bone marrow. The only current treatment for AML is a drug called Mylotarg, which was discovered in 1991, granted accelerated FDA approval in 2000, and removed from the market in 2010, because it caused potentially fatal liver disease. It was approved again in 2017, but carrying a warning that it was associated with “hepatotoxicity, including severe or fatal hepatic veno-occlusive disease.”

Immuto is developing a new treatment for AML, one that is currently being tested in mice. Choudhury believes it might make it to market in the next few years.

For Choudhury, this is the point of entrepreneurship: not making 10X money or building companies, but creating technologies and then using them to help people. It doesn't greatly matter if that's through sale to a Big Pharma firm or continuing to go it alone. The goal is to produce cures.

“This is our North Star,” he says. “What can we do to eradicate disease? How quickly can we get a therapeutic to a patient? Because patients are running against time here.”

Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door. But cure a cancer, and you solve a Very Big Problem. ●

John Allen is associate publisher of On Wisconsin, which, by coincidence, is the magazine you're reading right now. His capital portfolio is heavily invested in scratch-offs.

WARF's Diamonds

Although WARF has patented thousands of UW–Madison discoveries in its first century — it holds 2,245 active patents, 653 of which are licensed commercially — “only a handful of them have really produced the bulk of our income,” according to CEO Erik Iverson. “They're what we refer to as our diamonds in the rough.” These are the discoveries Iverson considers diamonds.

Vitamin D

It was the discovery that started it all: in 1923, UW biochemistry professor Harry Steenbock found that by irradiating foods with ultraviolet light, he could enrich them with Vitamin D. Two years later, he helped create WARF to patent that process. WARF kept the patent for 20 years.

Warfarin

In 1933, Karl Paul Link discovered the chemical dicoumarol in spoiled clover. Isolated as coumadin, it becomes the basis for warfarin — first commercialized as a rat poison in 1941. In 1947, warfarin was patented for a medical use as a blood thinner. It is now one of the most-prescribed drugs in the world.

Zemplar

In 1989, UW biochemist Hector DeLuca MS'53, PhD'55 patented the drug paricalcitol, a synthetic form of vitamin D. It's sold under the name Zemplar and helps patients suffering from kidney failure.

The 752 Patent

In the 1990s, computer science professor Guri Sohi developed high-performance computer chips that influenced the development of Intel and Apple processors.

JEFF MILLER, UW ARCHIVES





*As rules change for paying
student-athletes, UW-Madison
charts a path for success.*

A New Era for College Sports

BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

On July 1, 2025, the world of college athletics changed forever.

A few weeks after final approval of the landmark *House v. NCAA* settlement, universities began sending revenue-sharing payments directly to student-athletes. The date marked the definitive end of a system of amateurism that ruled college sports for decades but crumbled under legislative and legal scrutiny in recent years.

"It's a different game now," says Nolan Winter x'27, a star forward on the men's basketball team at UW-Madison, which is among the large majority of Division I schools that have opted in to the new structures of the settlement. "I think there are benefits and also downsides to it."

The hope for all parties — schools and student-athletes alike — is that the *House* settlement will bring some stability back to college athletics. Chaos has largely reigned since 2021, when a series of policy changes permitted student-athletes to profit from use of their name, image, and likeness (NIL) and to transfer schools unlimited times without losing playing eligibility. Lack of clarity on NIL rules has

given rise to questionable recruiting practices as programs search for a competitive edge.

"The past four years haven't been viewed as sustainable," says UW athletic director Chris McIntosh '04, MS'19. "It's been highly unstructured, very vague, ever evolving. Having said that, I am proud of the way that our organization and our people have navigated these times."

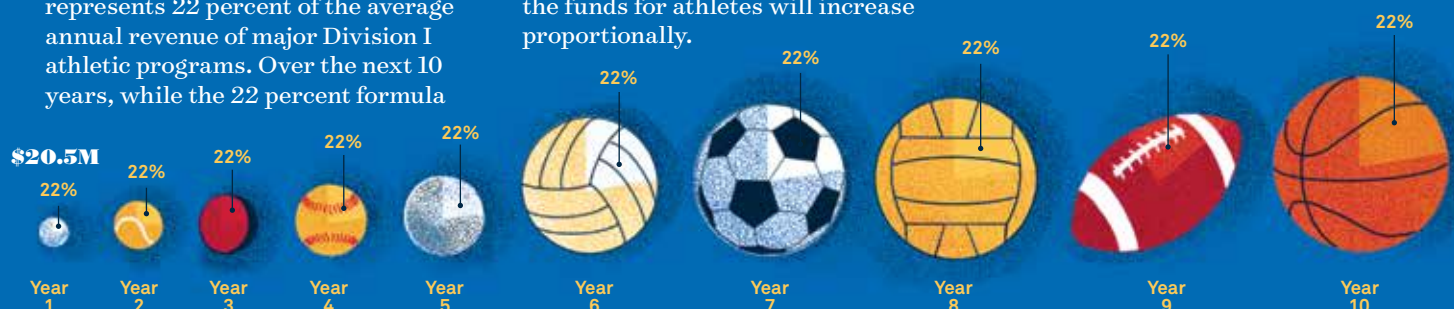
The *House* settlement establishes a framework for how universities can compensate student-athletes for the financial value they bring to their programs. (The case is named for one of the plaintiffs, Grant House, a former Arizona State swimmer.) It also creates oversight mechanisms to ensure that third-party NIL deals are legitimate, market-based sponsorships, rather than disguised payments to secure recruiting commitments — an escalating practice in recent years.

There will, of course, be winners and losers within this new model. Fortunately, Badger athletics has developed a playbook for success over the past four years: staying true to core values while embracing the change.

HOUSE V. NCAA SETTLEMENT, AT A GLANCE

Revenue sharing: In the 2025–26 academic year, each school can pay its student-athletes from a compensation pool of up to \$20.5 million. That cap represents 22 percent of the average annual revenue of major Division I athletic programs. Over the next 10 years, while the 22 percent formula

remains, the compensation pool will grow as annual revenues increase. If 2035–36 revenue compares to today's like a basketball next to a golf ball, then the funds for athletes will increase proportionally.



SCHOLARSHIP CAPS



VS.

ROSTER CAPS



Roster limits: Replacing scholarship caps, each sport will now have a maximum roster size (e.g., 105 for football, 18 for volleyball, 15 for basketball). Teams can still roster non-scholarship walk-ons, but there could be less room for them.

House Rules

This summer, Camp Randall opened its gates to concertgoers for the first time since 1997, with shows by Coldplay and Morgan Wallen. It's part of the athletic department's exploration of new revenue streams as it settles into the post-*House* era. Fans may have noticed other efforts of late, including Culver's logos on the Kohl Center court and expanded alcohol sales in the Camp Randall concourse.

"We've operated in a way that's been fiscally responsible, anticipating this change for years now," McIntosh says. "It's put us in a position in which we can and will contribute up to the limits of revenue sharing defined by *House*."

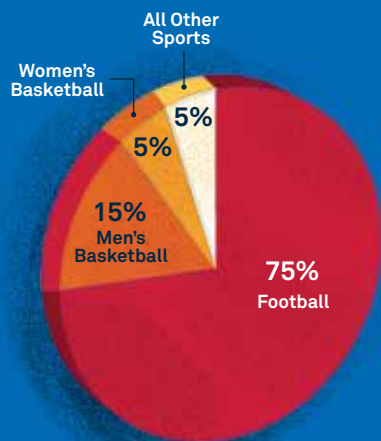
For the 2025–26 academic year, that means UW-Madison will allocate \$20.5 million directly to student-athletes. That maximum annual figure is expected to rise throughout the 10-year term of the *House* settlement, which caps the compensation pool at 22 percent of the average annual revenue that major Division I schools earn from broadcast rights, ticket sales, sponsorships, and other sources. The payments are on top of traditional scholarships and benefits, as well as third-party NIL deals. It's up to the discretion of schools to decide how the

compensation pool is distributed.

As part of *House* — a class action case that consolidated three federal antitrust lawsuits by former college athletes — the NCAA and its power conferences also agreed to pay some \$2.8 billion in back damages to players who did not have the ability to profit from NIL since 2016. The negotiated formula earmarks roughly 75 percent for football players, 15 percent for men's basketball, 5 percent for women's basketball, and 5 percent for all others. The payouts (on hold as of July because of a legal appeal over the formula) will come from the NCAA, though partly by reducing its future revenue distributions to conferences and schools.

At the UW, the football and men's basketball programs accounted for 75.3 and 13.6 percent of team-specific revenue, respectively, in 2024. Though several more sports generate revenue, those two are the only programs to run a profit and fund others.

Another structural change from the *House* settlement relates to roster management. The NCAA used to cap the number of scholarships schools could offer in each sport but did not limit roster sizes, creating lots of space for walk-ons. The settlement reverses the approach, removing the cap on scholarships but



BACK PAYMENTS BY SPORT

Back payments: The NCAA and its power conferences, including the Big Ten, will pay some \$2.8 billion to student-athletes who did not have the ability to profit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL) since 2016.

NIL Contract Proposal

Student-Athlete: Madison Dane

Company: Acme Number One

Deny

Approve

College Sports Commission:

Largely replacing NCAA enforcement, the new entity and its chief operating officer will act more efficiently in sanctioning rule violations.



NIL contract review: Managed by the accounting firm Deloitte, the NIL Go clearinghouse will review all student-athlete name, image, and likeness deals over \$600 to ensure they are for legitimate business purposes and true market value.

restricting the size of rosters. For instance, the new roster limit in football is 105 players, down from the 125 that the UW traditionally carried. The Badgers can now offer all 105 players scholarships, up from the prior cap of 85, though McIntosh notes that the walk-on tradition will remain at the UW.

In what was the final sticking point of the *House* settlement, any current student-athletes who might have been cut due to the new rule can stay on the team without counting toward the roster limit until their eligibility runs out.

As part of the grand compromise, while student-athletes can now receive direct revenue sharing, a new governing body will attempt to rein in some of the excesses of the early NIL era.

A Long Time Coming

After her freshman season in 2023, UW women's basketball point guard Ronnie Porter x'26 opened up her Instagram direct messages to find a \$25,000 NIL offer from Degree.

She thought it was spam. Eventually, she realized the deodorant brand was quite serious in recruiting her to its Degree Walk-On program, where she joined

four other Division I athletes as brand ambassadors with a national platform. She used it to share her journey of overcoming adversity as an undersized, underestimated walk-on.

"I didn't come from a lot," Porter says, "so I'm able to use what I get from NIL to do what I wasn't able to do growing up and also provide for my family. And that means everything."

Porter, now a senior, has developed into a mainstay in the UW's starting lineup and leveraged her success into other NIL arrangements. One of them is with Madison-based Exact Sciences. The health diagnostics company has developed an NIL program with an annual cohort of student-athletes. The deal includes social media sponsorships, community appearances, and tailored career coaching. UW volleyball player MJ Hammill '24 even landed a job at the company after completing the program.

You've likely come across other NIL work. Pepsi and Mountain Dew splashed Johnny Davis x'24 and Braelon Allen x'25 on billboards. American Family Insurance and volleyball star Devyn Robinson '24, MS'25 developed a social media campaign to celebrate her newfound voice as a role model. Rowing sisters Gracie '25 and Libby Walker x'27, whose grandfather

is a farmer and former UW rower, secured a sponsorship with the Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin.

“Those are the types of opportunities, where there’s value to all parties involved, that were a long time coming,” McIntosh says.

The UW was quick to get into the game. UW athletics established an NIL department in 2022, adding several dedicated staff positions that help student-athletes navigate the new world of opportunity. It provides educational programming around brand marketing and financial literacy, and manages a marketplace in which UW players can field sponsorship deals. Student-athletes also have access to UW Law School’s Law & Entrepreneurship Clinic for no-cost NIL contract review and legal assistance.

In a model reflected across college athletics, the UW has been supported by an independent nonprofit called The Varsity Collective. The group turns donations and business partnerships into the bulk of third-party NIL deals presented to UW student-athletes.

“Without them, I can’t imagine where we would be today,” McIntosh says. “They have stepped up at a time in which we desperately needed help, given the change of pace.”

The Wild, Wild West

The chance to create true business opportunities, McIntosh notes, is “what NIL was intended to be philosophically and what I hope it will be in the future.”

But in reality, before *House*, the national recruiting landscape often devolved into pay-for-play in the name of NIL — that is, school-affiliated donor

collectives offering financial packages to players for their expected contributions on the field, not for the market-based value and use of their name, image, and likeness. Some states even passed friendly legislation to give their home universities expanded leeway over NIL deals and protection from sanctions.

The NCAA first enacted an NIL rule change in July 2021 after several states passed laws on the matter and the Supreme Court signaled a broad skepticism of the amateurism model in an antitrust case called *NCAA v. Alston*. Fearing more legal battles, the NCAA put few constraints on NIL.

Primarily, it prohibited a school or its employees from directly paying a student-athlete.

The lack of NIL regulation, combined with unlimited transfers and the weak enforcement of existing recruiting rules, led to the wild, wild west. In addition to traditional recruiting, there’s been a scramble to retain current players and entice transfers — with NIL as an expanding part of the pitch. In a high-profile example from this past spring, a

Tennessee quarterback skipped practice while seeking to renegotiate his NIL contract before entering the transfer portal and leaving for UCLA. (In June, the UW and Varsity Collective filed a lawsuit against the University of Miami for allegedly interfering with a football player who had signed NIL agreements with them.)

A key area of the *House* settlement aims to restore order to the college sports landscape and NIL in particular. A new entity called the College Sports Commission is taking over most enforcement efforts from the NCAA, which has long been derided for its inefficiency and inconsistency with rule violations around recruiting and impermissible contact. It will have wide latitude in assessing infractions and resolving appeals through arbitration.

The College Sports Commission will oversee other systems put in place by *House*, including the NIL Go clearinghouse. Managed by the accounting firm Deloitte, the clearinghouse will review all third-party NIL deals over \$600 to ensure legitimate business purpose and realistic compensation using a market-value algorithm.

These reforms, McIntosh believes, will ultimately benefit the UW.

“Market-based NIL remains a huge opportunity for our student-athletes, and I think that’s an area in which Wisconsin can thrive,” McIntosh says. “We have an incredibly high level of engagement with sponsored partners and businesses, not just in the Madison market, but across the state and beyond.”

Core Values

Not all universities are as well positioned to succeed in the post-*House* era, either financially or competitively.

The Ivy League conference and a smattering of other schools opted out of the *House* agreement and revenue sharing altogether. The move preserves their existing financial model but leaves them without a major recruiting tool. Other universities have already cut smaller programs such as tennis, swimming, and track and field for fear of *House*’s financial fallout, a conversation that McIntosh insists is a nonstarter at the UW.

“Our priority is to preserve 23 sport programs at Wisconsin,” he says. “Broad-based opportunity is one of our core values.”

Badger fans have experienced the joys that come with a deep varsity sport lineup, even in these years of upheaval. Women’s hockey won the 2025 national title in an overtime thriller. Men’s cross country has won seven consecutive conference championships. (See page 22.) Volleyball continues to sell out the Field House. Last year, UW men’s basketball served as a notable case study for how to build a competitive team in an evolving landscape while sticking to your principles.

The hope for all parties is that the House settlement will bring some stability back to college athletics.

After the 2023–24 season, the Badgers lost a pair of key starters to lucrative opportunities in the transfer portal: point guard Chucky Hepburn x’26 left for Louisville, while leading scorer AJ Storr x’26 landed at Kansas. Many observers expected a down year.

In this era, some coaches would have searched the portal for splashy replacements to quiet the headlines. But not Greg Gard. He believed in developing his remaining roster and complementing it with players who would fit in well.

“Our strategy begins with retention and building around the student-athletes we’ve recruited since high school,” he says. “In addition, we’ve tried to be very smart about who we add as transfers to fill out our roster. Adding players who will fit in culturally, academically, and socially is just as important as how they’ll fit from a basketball standpoint.”

Enter John Tonje MS’25, a senior guard coming off an injury-ravaged season at Missouri where he averaged just 2.6 points per game. The unheralded transfer transformed into a superstar on the Badgers, scoring 19.6 points per game, earning All-American honors, and emerging as an NBA draft pick.

“The culture and foundation around him here at Wisconsin gave John an on-ramp to having immediate success,” Gard says. “He came in wanting to earn everything that was given to him.”

Gard’s belief in his roster and Tonje’s ever-steady presence proved contagious. Seniors Kamari McGee ’25 and Carter Gilmore ’25, underdogs who stuck with the program for years despite scant playing time, emerged as solid contributors. Nolan Winter and John Blackwell x’27 took big leaps in their sophomore seasons. Returning starters Steven Crowl ’24, MSx’26 and Max Klesmit ’25 rounded out a squad that, against the odds, improved its record to 27–10 and earned a top-three seed to March Madness. And by season’s end, ESPN rated Tonje the best transfer in all of college basketball.

Then in May, eight players from that team earned their college degrees. Perhaps surprising for the times, the graduation rate for student-athletes at UW–Madison has risen to a record 94 percent.

“It’s my number one point of pride from this past season,” Gard says. “As much as we talk about other things, graduating is still the end goal. In the recruiting process, academic success is nonnegotiable.”

The State of Play

In March, McIntosh traveled to Washington, DC, to testify in front of the U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee on antitrust.

“There is no doubt that college athletics is at an inflection point where the decisions made over the next couple of years will define the landscape for the foreseeable future,” he told the members.

For as many questions as the *House* settlement answers, it leaves the door open to even more.



Antitrust lawsuits against the NCAA continue, including cases that aim to classify student-athletes as full employees and target rules such as the four-year eligibility limit. Uncertainty swirls around the intersections of *House* and Title IX, the federal law that ensures equal opportunity for men and women in college sports.

McIntosh believes stabilizing college athletics will require national legislation to preempt a patchwork of state laws, confirm the classification of student-athletes as nonemployees, and provide limited antitrust protections. (At press time, there was movement on a presidential executive order and congressional legislation around such issues.)

“We need safe harbor so that we can create common sense rules that are necessary to operate sport,” he says. Or as he told the subcommittee: “I don’t think we want 13-year college athletes.”

For the UW’s athletic director, preserving meaningful opportunities for future generations of student-athletes is deeply personal.

“My experience as a student-athlete transformed my life,” says McIntosh, who starred on Badger football’s offensive line in the late ’90s. “While so much has changed since then, the core of what this opportunity can do for a young person hasn’t changed at all — the ability to leave here with a degree from the University of Wisconsin, compete under the mentorship of world-class coaches and leaders, and grow socially.

“That’s the experience I want for all our student-athletes in each of their sports. What’s changed is how we deliver it.” ●

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

FAKE NEWS!

Thanks to UW alumni, the Onion birthed modern news satire, helping America to process its dysfunctions through humor.

BY CHRISTINE WENC '91



Early Onion staffer Christine Wenc '91 has written a comprehensive history of the irreverent publication.

...ctor Jack Farness.
first time, we have
evidence of what
ected for the past
Life really isn't worth living."
e at their conclusions, study
first identified the average



ONION

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The publication added an online version in 1996 and ceased printing in 2013, although it brought back a print version for subscribers in 2024.

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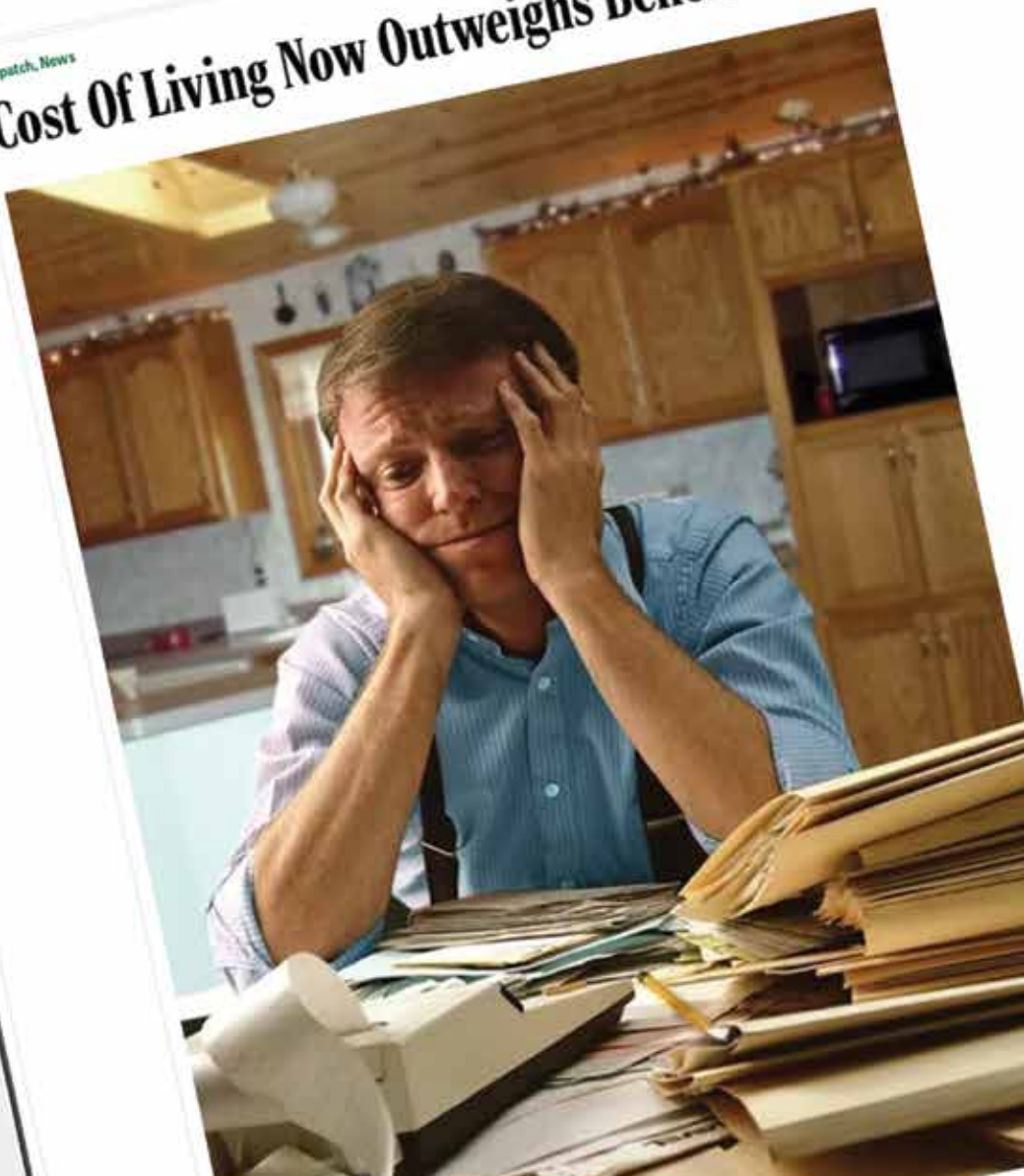
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Dispatch, News

Cost Of Living Now Outweighs Benefits



In *Funny Because It's True: How the Onion Created Modern American News Satire*, Christine Wenc '91 compiled an exhaustive history of the *Onion*, the humor newspaper that began on the UW-Madison campus in the late '80s. Wenc lived for a time in the same apartment as cofounder Tim Keck x'90 and was a copy editor, writer, and illustrator for the paper in its early years. Now an independent historian and editor at UW-Madison's School of Education, she spent six years conducting "about a million interviews" for what she originally conceived of as an oral history. When Wenc ended up with way too much material, she switched to a prose history, which she published with the help of literary agent Daniel Greenberg '92, another former *Onion* staffer.

Wenc covers the paper's evolution from a way to make money by students who had no idea what they were doing to a phenomenon that influenced today's style of news parody. The *Onion*'s approach to making up the news is now ingrained in the nation's psyche, to the point where people react to headlines that strain credulity by saying, "It sounds like an *Onion* story."

Wenc engagingly captures the staff's free-wheeling chutzpah, which she attributes partly to '90s slacker culture. When an advertiser asked to speak with the publisher, they had to look up what a publisher does, make up a name for their mythical administrator, and have someone posing as the publisher call back. Wenc also highlights the absurdly random nature of the staff's early decisions, from the name of the publication to its very concept. But, seemingly by accident, the paper succeeded from the beginning.

As Wenc says, "A bunch of 20-something Generation X nobodies out in flyover country had invented something that would become one of the most culturally influential American publications of all time."

This excerpt deals with the very early days of the *Onion*.



[In 1988, Tim] Keck decided to start his own newspaper. "I didn't really have a good idea of what that was; I just knew I wanted to start a newspaper. I was going to quit school and do this newspaper. And then I met this guy in a history of science class, part of the Integrated Liberal Studies program at Madison. His name was Chris Johnson x'91.

"He's one of those people that just has a weird light and energy around them. Completely fearless," Keck says. "Can make a trip to the grocery store weird and uncomfortable and electric. He had this crazy childhood in Brazil and Poland and Sweden, and then he went to high school in Lodi, Wisconsin.

"When I met Chris," Tim says, "I was like, 'That's

the guy. I can't do this on my own. I need somebody like Chris to do it with me.' I talked to him about the idea, and he immediately jumped in."

Amy Reyer '89 (Amy Bowles at the time, who would sell ads and write for the *Onion* in its first year) says, "Tim has a healthy dark streak that draws him to the most complicated, brilliant people. He's genuinely curious about what makes someone tick. The weirder, the better."

But then, out of the blue, not long after they'd started brainstorming, Johnson said he was going to drop out of school and move back to Brazil with his dad to work on a business venture. Tomorrow. He packed up his stuff and vanished.

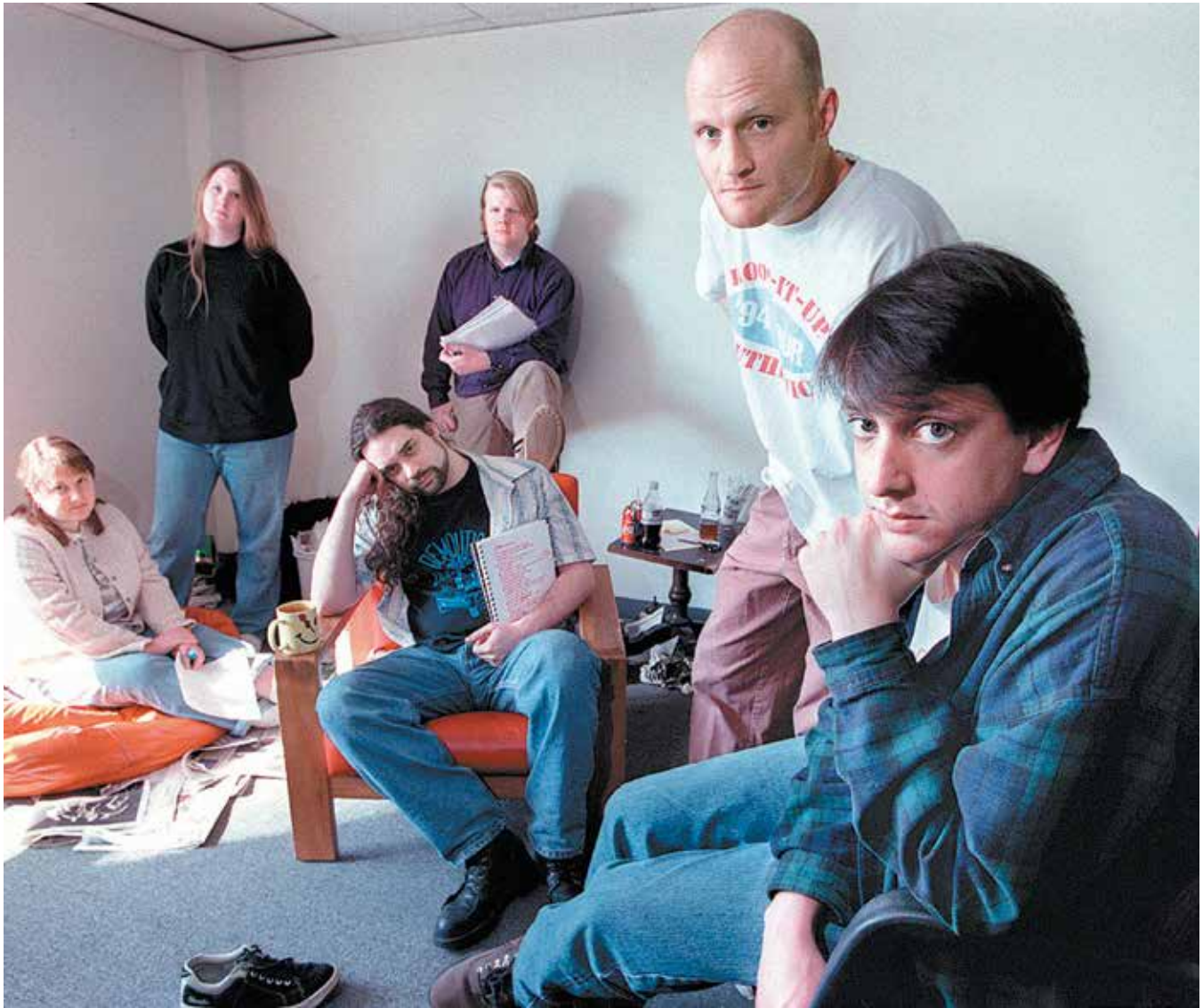
"A bunch of 20-something Generation X nobodies out in flyover country had invented something that would become one of the most culturally influential American publications of all time."

Keck was shocked and bereft at the abrupt loss of his friend and purported business partner. At the same time, he was impressed by the boldness of it all. The disregard for convention. The hugeness of the move. He kept on working on the newspaper idea, but found he didn't have the confidence to do it by himself. So he decided to go to Brazil on a cheap courier flight and convince Johnson to come back. He returned victorious and very hungover 10 days later. Johnson had said he would return in six months.

Keck had taken a room in my apartment around this time, and I remember him telling me about the newspaper idea when he got back from Brazil. He said they wanted me to be the art director, whatever that was. (Though I did do some drawings now and then, I actually became the copy editor.) I hadn't met Johnson yet, but I was excited enough that I wrote about it in my diary: March 3, 1988.

Johnson finally got back to town, and then it was time to rock. "We didn't have editorial ideas or anything complicated like that," Keck says. "We just wanted to start a newspaper." Keck's mom loaned them \$3,000, and they rented a [rundown] three-bedroom apartment on East Johnson Street, a few blocks from both State Street and the capitol, to be the office — and their home. The living room was the production and editorial area, and Andy Dhuey '89 was brought in to live in the third bedroom and help pay the rent. Keck's mom would also be their adviser.

The first problem was what to call it. The only requirement was that it couldn't be serious. Maybe *The Rag*? How about *The Paper*? Then one day they were visiting Johnson's uncle Nels, who lived in



Madison. “We ate onion sandwiches a lot,” Keck says. “Why, I don’t know, but we did, and Johnson’s uncle said, ‘Why don’t you call it the *Onion*?’” Keck adds, “I’m sorry I don’t have an interesting story about why we called it the *Onion*; that’s it. We made a lot of snap decisions in those days.”

Reyer’s roommate, Pete Haise ’90, tells me, “And then I think somebody drew a pretty good onion, and that was the clincher.”

Keck wasn’t sure how you charged for advertising in a newspaper, so he called “every publication in New York” to get their media kits. “A media kit is a thing that says how big ads are, how much the ads are, all that kind of crap. But I didn’t know any of that stuff. So I called *New York Magazine*, I called the *New Yorker*, I called the *Atlantic*, I called everybody. Nobody sent me anything except for the *New Yorker*.” Keck took the rate card, whited out the *New Yorker*, and put the *Onion* on it instead. (He left the rest the way it was.) Keck then called up his

Dawg calendar advertisers, told them about his new project, and gave them the rate card. [The one-page monthly calendar had been illustrated with cartoons based on James Sturm ’87’s *Daily Cardinal* cartoon *Down and Out Dawg* and sold advertising. Keck had been distributing it to students and paying his rent with the proceeds.]

There would also be coupons on the bottom of the front page, he said. “They were all thrilled with me because of the coupon concept. Everybody loves coupons.”

Sturm agreed to let the new paper publish *Down and Out Dawg*. Keck also found another cartoonist he wanted to publish: Scott Dikkers x’87, the creator of *Jim’s Journal*. As Keck put it, “The *Daily Cardinal* paid them \$5 a comic strip. I paid them \$10.”

“So now we had some advertisers,” Keck said. “We had a name. We rented a Mac. This is in 1988, so it was a [primitive] little Mac, the ones where you had to put the floppy disk in and out and change

Onion staff members shown above in 1999 include Maria Schneider ’90, Carol Kolb ’95, Todd Hanson x’86 (seated), Tim Harrod, Scott Dikkers x’87, and Robert Siegel (seated).



The Onion's first issue warned about a "Mendota Monster." Later stories became more political, such as the above headline on economic inequality, or the paper's most famous headline, which it runs after major mass shootings: "No Way to Prevent This," Says Only Nation Where This Regularly Happens."

No cause they wanted to promote. No message they wanted to send. They did love *Spy* magazine. Doing something in that spirit would be cool. But, otherwise, no topic fascinated them enough to make an entire newspaper about it.

As far as I know, only one other person from my high school class besides me graduated from UW-Madison, a guy named Todd Brown '93. He was good-looking, funny, and charismatic, with parents from the Twin Cities. One day I went to visit him in his dorm during our freshman year, and he had a new friend there, a guy he'd met at the Ark Improv, a little independent theater a few blocks from State Street where he'd been taking classes and performing: Matt Cook '89. Matt and I hit it off right away. He was from Chicago, he was really funny, and he was wearing a Joy Division T-shirt. We started hanging out all the time. That summer at a party at my first

it 80 times just to run a program. But we didn't have any idea about the content in the publication."

They had no editorial mission.

apartment, a tiny, sweltering attic two-bedroom on Conklin Place I shared with our friend Rachel [Johnson x'89], I introduced Keck to Matt Cook. Several of us were hanging out on the street — really an alleyway — waiting for Matt to show up.

"The first time I saw Matt Cook," Keck said, "he was roller-skating with a refrigerator box on top of him down the street and then intentionally running into [stuff]. Like 'Oh no! Oh no!' and then 'It's okay, I'm okay!' Like doing tons of pratfalls." The box was so big it covered Matt completely, making it look like it was zooming around all by itself. He careened around bashing into things, and we all just about died laughing. Keck said, "Matt is really funny, and he's self-hating, and creative, and not afraid to make a fool of himself. He kind of likes it. And that's the ingredients of a great comedian."

Keck says, "If there was a person who created the *Onion's* voice, it would be Matt Cook."

Brian Stack MA'88, who later became a writer and performer with Second City, Conan O'Brien, and Stephen Colbert, started his performance career at the Ark Improv in Madison. He told me that Matt Cook was in the first show he ever saw there. Cook joined other interesting performers from that era, like Joan '84 and Bill Cusack. And also, "Chris Farley, the late great Chris Farley," was there, too, "with his bandana and his Marquette rugby jacket." Cook says, "I was Chris Farley's first director. I taught him everything he knew about comedy except for cocaine and hookers and booze, because he learned that stuff by himself."

Stack praises Cook and his creative style. "Matt was one of the most original thinkers I've ever met. He would do very, very fun experimental things with the Ark that were very conceptual and weird in wonderful ways."

One day, Keck and Johnson asked Cook to meet with them. "It was this baby-businessman thing," Cook said. The calendar had been pretty successful, Keck and Johnson said. Now they wanted to do a newspaper. Cook asked them what kind of newspaper, and they said that's why they'd invited him to the meeting. "So sitting there at that time, at that very meeting, I said, 'How about we just make it all up? Have all made-up stories, but play it like it's a real newspaper?'"

Keck remembered that the *Cardinal* did an April Fools' Day parody every year that was always really popular. "Well, I'm just gonna ... do that," he thought. The *Onion* would not be a real newspaper. It would be a comedic parody of one.

Keck and Johnson finally had their concept. They went to Reyer and Haise's place and said, "Okay, we're gonna unveil this thing. You're sworn to secrecy." (Their other roommate was Deidre Buckingham '89, who became the photographer for the *Onion* in the first year. Buckingham, a skilled photographer and darkroom developer, told me that

she had always wanted to be a photojournalist, but had flunked the skills test to get into UW's journalism school because she couldn't spell. The *Onion* became her outlet instead.)

Reyer says, "I didn't even know them well enough to guess what it was. I was so sure it was gonna be lame." They unveiled the concept and explained: "We're gonna make up fake news. And people are going to believe it."

They said it was going to be called the *Onion*, and Reyner said, "Please tell me that it isn't like the onion has these deep layers of meaning. Is it just random?"

Johnson and Keck said, "It's totally random. People will think it means something, but it doesn't."

"We're gonna make up fake news. And people are going to believe it."

"That was the beginning of it," Reyner says. "And it actually was a big deal. It never felt like that at the time, though." They asked Reyner if she wanted to help out, and she immediately said yes; she had a huge crush on Keck. She began selling ads, brainstorming, and eventually doing a little writing. Buckingham signed on, too.

Amy Reyner was born in New York City. When her family moved to Washington, DC, she attended the school Sidwell Friends. "It was a private school with some really smart kids," she says. "And I did not feel like one of them." For college, she wanted something completely different. "I thought, 'I want to go to a Big Ten school. And I want to be anonymous.'"

Anonymity was important. Amy has a very famous older sister, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, a Second City and *Saturday Night Live* alum who had been working in film and would soon be cast in a lead role on *Seinfeld*. Amy's younger sister is actress Lauren Bowles. Amy, the middle child, said she was a theater kid too. "But it's not what I wanted to do. I was good at it, but it's not what I wanted to do." She was also tired of being in a small place — her Sidwell class was only about a hundred people — as well as "sort of being labeled as a dumb blonde" there. "That sucked," she says. "It really sucked. And UW-Madison, when I visited, I thought, 'Oh my God, this is so great. It's, like, 85 percent blonde. Nobody will notice me. I'm just gonna be a regular person here.'"

Keck and Johnson asked Haise if he would sell ads. He said no. Though he used to do ad sales for the *Cardinal*, he was done with that. He had gotten fired from the *Cardinal* for skipping too many meetings. And he had other jobs now: he rented apartments, he sold used cars, and he bartended. Whatever worked to keep him cruising. But after being asked "five times," he finally caved, and within a few weeks he was the advertising manager.

Haise saw it as "rallying around a cause," saying,

"I never thought there could have been a better job."

Haise was from Wauwatosa, a suburb of Milwaukee, a place for which he had great affection. His parents had divorced when he was young, and it may not have been a great time for him. Luckily, Haise was a very outgoing and social guy, and he had his hometown to give him a foundation even if his parents were not together. At the time, I saw him as this sort of surfer-dude Deadhead. According to Reyner, he was "baked all the time."

The first issue of the *Onion* came out in the fall of 1988, with the front-page story "Mendota Monster Mauls Madison," written by Matt Cook under the pseudonym Gunnar Downes (they wanted the most macho-sounding name possible), about a mythical lake monster named Bozho. The purposely blurry photo by Deidre Buckingham showed the head of the "monster" breaching the water. It was actually Tim Keck's arm with a stocking over it; Photoshop had not been invented yet. (I remember seeing him at the office afterward and asking why he was all wet.)

The rest of the issue was a pretty anarchic mix of stuff. Most of it was written in the week or two before the first issue came out. In addition to copyediting, I wrote occasionally that year too; in the first issue I have a little story of the sort that would later be called "flash fiction." We also published a story by a creative writing friend of mine.

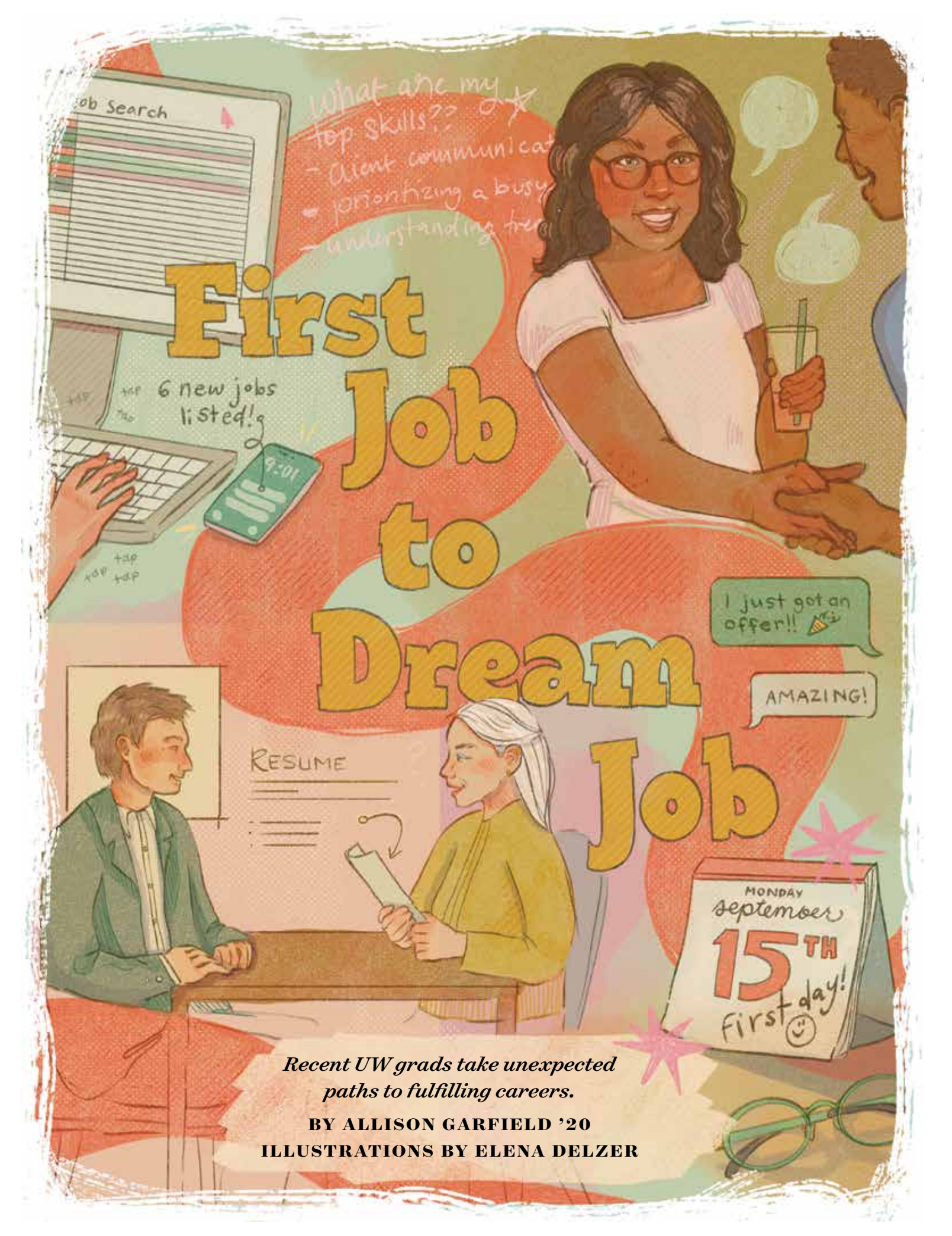
The issue included excerpts from the campus police blotter — gossip content that people would want to read, but that you didn't have to pay for. Lorin Miller '90 and Sandra Schlies '90 wrote soap-opera summaries, which turned out to be one of the main reasons people picked up the paper. To create some buzz before the first issue hit the streets, Keck and Johnson printed out stickers with the *Onion*'s name and the motto they'd invented, "Witty, Irreverent, and a Little Nasty," and stuck them up around town.

Keck said, "And it was just a pile of crap. When I saw it, I was like, 'This is really, really bad.' But strangely, it was successful. Like, right off the bat."

A student at Madison at the time, future *Onion* writer Joe Garden x'92, said, "I remember being kind of impressed by it because back in those days, you had the regular alternative weekly, you had the socialist weekly, you had the feminist weekly. You had a second socialist weekly. The music weekly. You had all these free papers everywhere. And the *Onion*, even as raw and primitive as it was with the 'Mendota Monster' issue, it stood out from the rest of them."

In only 10 months, Keck and Johnson had made the *Onion* out of nothing into a highly popular campus presence. ●

Excerpted from Funny Because It's True: How the Onion Created Modern American News Satire by Christine Wenc. Copyright © 2025. Available from Running Press, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.



First Job to Dream Job

What are my top skills??

- client communication
- prioritizing a busy
- understanding the

Job Search

6 new jobs listed!

I just got an offer!! 🎉

AMAZING!

RESUME

MONDAY
September
15TH
first day! 😊

Recent UW grads take unexpected paths to fulfilling careers.

**BY ALLISON GARFIELD '20
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELENA DELZER**

The transition from college to career is rarely straightforward. The final moments of a UW-Madison education can be overshadowed by the all-too-common question: “What are you doing after graduation?” Whether you left campus with a plan or a sense of uncertainty, first jobs can be stepping stones to something greater — sometimes in surprising ways.

I graduated during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and remember the added layer of stress that came with searching for my first job. Friends left and right were pivoting to remote roles, moving across the country, finding new ways to use the lessons they learned in the classroom. As a journalism major, I knew there was a job out there for me somewhere, but questions weighed on me as I began my search: Would I find something fulfilling? Where would it take me next?

My path was typical for a young reporter. Eager to make my mark, I started off as an intern at one of Wisconsin’s largest newspapers and then transitioned into a full-time reporting gig at a smaller paper in central Wisconsin. I cried when I didn’t get a job I’d been hoping for at a bigger publication. I learned, as many grads do, that it’s necessary to “work your way up.”

Despite my initial concerns, my first job was formative. It was also nerve-racking and intimidating. I had to fight off imposter syndrome at every turn while learning new skills and getting to know new colleagues. Everyone offered advice: Be yourself. Build your network. Find a mentor. Be patient. Take risks. Solve problems on your own. Ask for help.

At the time, it all seemed impossible. But eventually the advice paid off, and my journalism career kicked into gear.

The job market for recent grads is ever-changing. As always, some fields are booming and others lagging. But Badgers can find success anywhere. The following stories highlight UW alumni who found themselves on unexpected paths, overcame early struggles, or discovered a passion they had never anticipated — all traced back to that pivotal first job.

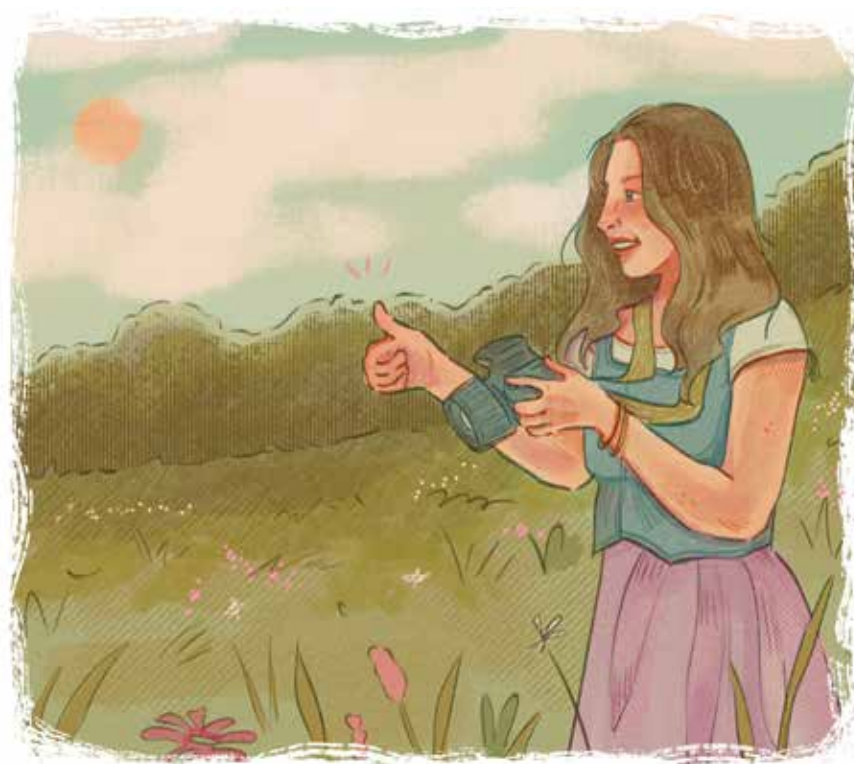
“What If I Just Went All In on This?”

Katie Roberson ’19 knows the sting of postgrad rejection all too well.

“I applied to so many jobs in advertising and communications,” she recalls. “I got some interviews, but nothing panned out. It was disheartening.”

After graduating with a degree in communication arts and a certificate in digital studies, she juggled multiple jobs at Target and a Madison event-planning company, on top of an endless stream of applications. But one thing remained constant: photography.

“I had been taking pictures since freshman year of college — mostly for fun and for a little extra money,” Roberson says. “One day, I realized I was spending more time editing photos than applying for



After a disheartening entry into the job market, Katie Roberson took a risk and started a photography business.

jobs. And I thought, ‘What if I just went all in on this?’”

The idea was both thrilling and terrifying. A creative passion wasn’t the same as a stable career, and she wrestled with doubts about whether she could turn it into something sustainable. But after months of contemplation, she decided to take the leap. In 2020, she officially launched Katie Ann Photography LLC.

Then the world shut down with COVID-19.

“All of my bookings got canceled overnight,” she says. “It felt like the worst possible time to start a business.”

But rather than give up, Roberson pivoted. She leaned into learning, honing her craft, refining her marketing strategy, and connecting with potential clients online. She offered discounted sessions to build her portfolio and experimented with different types of photography.

Slowly, word spread.

“I remember the moment things started to shift,” Roberson says. “I opened bookings for summer senior photo sessions in late spring and suddenly had dozens of inquiries, and for the first time, I thought, ‘This might actually work.’”

Five years later, Roberson has built a thriving business, specializing in high school seniors, college graduates, and family portraits. What started as a side hustle has become a full-time career — one she never imagined but wouldn’t trade for anything.

“Taking that leap and believing in myself was the best decision I ever made,” she says.

Roberson says a first job doesn’t necessarily have to be traditional. “If you have a skill or passion that you love, don’t be afraid to explore making it your career. The risk might just pay off.”



For more profiles and video of students who parlayed their UW-Madison degrees into dream jobs, scan the QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/firstjobs.



LAUNCHING A CAREER AT UW-MADISON

The UW offers robust career services through dedicated offices within each school and college, providing tailored support to students as they prepare for life after graduation. Services include one-on-one advising, résumé and interview workshops, career fairs, job and internship postings, and on-campus recruiting. Students can access these resources through a career adviser or through Handshake, a free online platform for finding jobs and internships. See careers.wisc.edu.

A decision to step out of his comfort zone and arrange a networking meeting changed Aaron Her's life.

“Say Yes to Conversations”

Adaptability is a hallmark of being a Badger.

For Aaron Her '24, there was no clear roadmap for breaking into the business world. With a degree in consumer behavior, he landed an internship at the department store chain Kohl's, working in marketing and analytics at the corporate headquarters.

Having grown up in Milwaukee in a low-income household, Her didn't have industry connections or a clear-cut path to success.

“I've seen how valuable networking is. While many of my peers landed great internships or mentors through family connections, coming from a family of immigrants meant not having that,” he says. “I've had to work harder to get an opportunity and to prove myself.”

But Her's willingness to step outside his comfort zone opened unexpected doors. While he was still figuring out his career path at Kohl's, a conversation at a networking event changed everything. He met an executive from Dell Technologies who introduced a new perspective on sales.

“At first, I kind of brushed it off,” Her admits. “I always thought sales was just cold-calling people and pushing them to buy stuff. But the way he described it, as problem-solving, as relationship-building, made me see it in a totally different light.”

Her reached out to the executive on LinkedIn and asked if he'd be open to grabbing coffee.

“That conversation ended up changing my life,” he says.

Her began researching sales roles at Dell and applying to sales training programs. His efforts paid off with a position as an inside sales account executive at Dell in Austin, Texas.

“I remember getting the job offer and feeling this mix of excitement and fear,” he recalls. “I had never done sales before. But I reminded myself that the skills I had — communication, adaptability, persistence — would carry me through.”

Now Her is responsible for generating more than \$2 million in revenue and managing a diverse portfolio of clients. He's thriving in a field he never initially considered.

“I had to create my own opportunities,” he says. “Even when the path isn't clear, believing in yourself and seeking out connections can lead to incredible possibilities.”

His advice to new grads?

“Say yes to conversations. You never know which one will change your life.”

“Life’s What You Make It”

Tamia Fowlkes ’22 always thought her path would take her far from home. After earning her journalism and political science degrees from UW–Madison and completing a master’s in journalism at Columbia University, the Milwaukee native was set on chasing big stories outside of Wisconsin. But when an opportunity came up in Milwaukee at the same newspaper where she had interned as an undergraduate, it felt like the perfect choice.

Fowlkes is a public investigator at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, covering labor, politics, and culture — exactly the kind of journalism she dreamed of doing growing up.

“When I was offered the job, I had a call with my mom, and she said, ‘I remember when you said in your eighth-grade graduation speech that you wanted to report on your community and make a positive impact,’” Fowlkes recalls.

Fowlkes has written about national political conventions and interviewed the pop star Chappell Roan, but she’s most passionate about helping everyday readers — those who reach out to her with tips, concerns, and questions.

Like many fields, journalism can be tough to break into, but Fowlkes advises new graduates to pursue their passions and not wait for permission.

“I think back to that Hannah Montana song: ‘Life’s what you make it, so let’s make it rock,’” she says with a laugh. “My college career and the time after has been defined by following my gut and knowing exactly what I want to get out of something, and then trying my best to actively pursue it. Even if it doesn’t always work out, at least I tried.

“People can certainly tell you no,” Fowlkes adds, “but the best thing you can do is just put yourself out there and keep trying.”



Tamia Fowlkes (above) followed her gut and landed her ideal journalism job, while Tyler Ogorek benefited from an unexpected career pivot.

“On the Cutting Edge of Innovation”

After earning a doctorate in chemistry, Tyler Ogorek PhD’24 didn’t head to a research lab or pharmaceutical company like many of his peers. Instead, he made an unexpected pivot into business strategy.

Now, he’s a consultant at Bain & Company in Chicago, where he works with clients across industries to tackle complex challenges. To Ogorek, his path is a reminder that career boundaries are often more flexible than they seem.

“Not many PhDs know that consulting is a field that’s open to them,” he says. “It’s an extremely rewarding career path that should be top-of-mind for PhDs looking to enter the workforce in an area not strictly aligned with their educational background.”

The leap into consulting wasn’t random. It was strategic, informed by careful preparation. The role constantly pushes him to think critically and creatively.

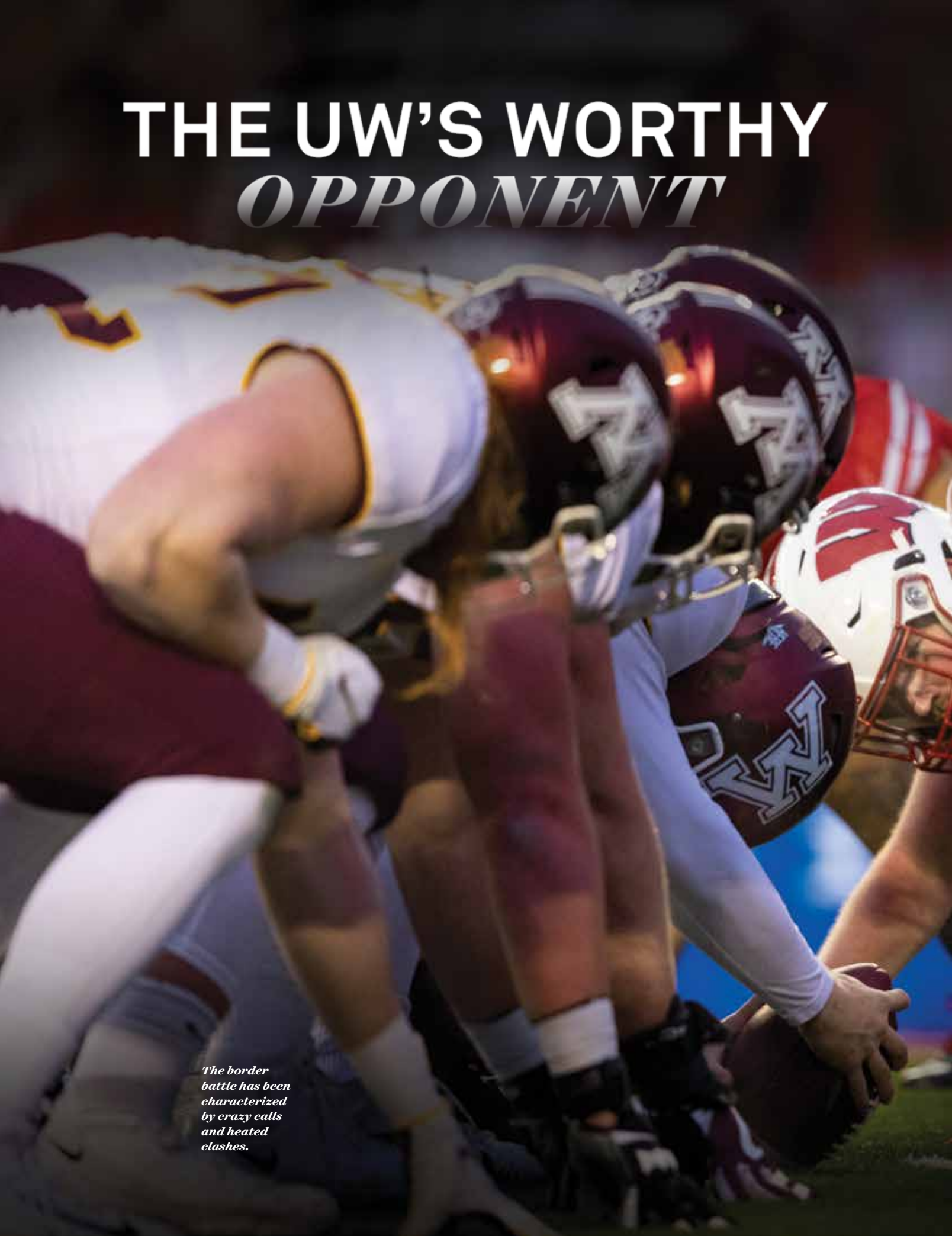
The real draw for Ogorek is the intellectual thrill. “I work with clients across all strategy topics,” he says. “You get a chance to solve the toughest problems businesses face, in topics on the cutting edge of innovation.”

Whether you’re working in a chemistry lab or a corporate boardroom, Ogorek is proof that the most rewarding career pivots are often the ones that blend curiosity with courage. ●

Allison Garfield ’20 is a freelance journalist based in Chicago. She still remembers her first job-interview outfit.



THE UW'S WORTHY *OPPONENT*



*The border
battle has been
characterized
by crazy calls
and heated
clashes.*

The sports rivalry between the Badgers and the Minnesota Gophers has produced legends and lore for the ages.

BY DOUG MOE '79



There is general agreement that the game that took an already fierce college athletics rivalry and sent it soaring to new levels of impassioned intensity occurred November 24, 1962, in Madison.

The border-battle football rivalry between the University of Wisconsin Badgers and University of Minnesota Gophers was already one of the oldest in the country, dating to 1890.

Other sports — notably men's and women's hockey — would eventually contribute their own chapters to the storied Badger-Gopher matchups, but in 1962, football was king. What happened in Camp Randall Stadium on that November day still resonates, more than six decades later.

"The most significant game of all in a highly significant rivalry," says Joel Maturi, a Minnesota native who was an assistant athletic director at UW-Madison and, later, athletic director at Minnesota.

Bill Brophy, another native Minnesotan who served as sports editor of the *Wisconsin State Journal* in Madison, was a young boy in 1962. But he remembers.

"My dad took the train to Madison for the game," Brophy says. "He was still mad a month later. He told me the story. He said Minnesota got screwed."

The game had large implications — the winner would go to the Rose Bowl.

The Gophers led, 9-7, when the Badgers tried to mount a late fourth-quarter drive starting at their own 20-yard line. Three completions from Ron Vander Kelen '64 to his star receiver, Pat Richter '64, JD'71 (later UW athletic director), brought the ball to the Minnesota 43-yard line. Two and a half minutes to play.

The next play lives in infamy for Gopher fans. Vander Kelen was rushed and hit by Minnesota's star defensive tackle, Bobby Bell. His wobbly pass was intercepted, and joyous Gopher fans began dreaming about Pasadena in January.

Except a 15-yard penalty was called on Bell for roughing the passer. And soon another 15 yards was tacked on for "unsportsmanlike remarks from the sidelines," as *Sports Illustrated* put it.

Suddenly the Badgers were at the Minnesota 13-yard line.

"We still had to take it in," Richter recalls, 63 years later. "I've seen a lot of crazy calls in my life, but you have to play it as it is and execute."

They scored three plays later, winning 14-9. Minnesota players and fans were outraged.

"I touched the ball," Bell told *Sports Illustrated*. "It was a legitimate rush."

Crazy calls, the introduction of a slab of bacon, then an axe, and a heated personality clash between two charismatic hockey coaches — the rivalry between Badgers and Gophers athletics has produced legends and lore for the ages.

"Badgers May Abolish Football"

Incredibly, the football series, which began in 1890 and will continue this year in Minneapolis on November 29, is currently dead even. Each team has won 63 games, and there have been eight ties.

In 2010, when the Big Ten Conference added Nebraska and went to two divisions in football, Minnesota and Wisconsin were split up. Though teams would be allowed a crossover game, some discussions of scheduling did not include a Gophers vs. Badgers matchup.

"I think both [then UW athletic director] Barry Alvarez and I said that a game had to happen," recalls Maturi, who then led Gopher athletics. "I made the comment at a meeting, 'If we don't play each other, I'm going to get fired.'"

The game happened, and indeed, only once in the 135-year history of the rivalry did the Badgers and Gophers not meet on the football field.

What caused them not to play in 1906 was the culmination of a decade-plus rash of serious injuries that led some to question whether college football should continue.

News accounts from those early games tell the story. Reporting on the first Badgers-Gophers meeting, in November 1890 — won 63-0 by Minnesota — the *Green Bay Weekly Gazette* noted: "The usual number of accidents occurred during the game — Leary of the Minnesota team having his nose broken; of the UW men, Davidson sprained his ankle; Sumner was quite seriously injured by colliding with one of his opponents, and Kerr, the captain of the team, was seriously injured about the head in a collision. He protested that he was not seriously hurt and continued playing but finally fell unconscious and was carried off the field."

By 1906, university faculty and administrators discussed doing away with the sport. A March 1906 *Wisconsin State Journal* headline read: "Badgers May Abolish Football."

There was a mass student protest on campus. Football survived, but the Badgers-Gophers game was suspended, as a *Minneapolis Star Tribune* columnist explained in 1973: "The reason they didn't play in 1906: college football with its mass formations had become too brutal. President Teddy Roosevelt ordered the colleges to suspend their most intense rivalries. ... Roosevelt directed the rules committee to create a more open game. Thus the forward pass was introduced."

An Axe and a Slab of Bacon

By 1930, the history and intensity of the Badgers-Gophers rivalry led a Minneapolis dentist named R. B. Fouch — a 1914 Minnesota alumnus — to create an unusual trophy.

Carved from black walnut, "it is two feet long and one foot wide," the *Star Tribune* reported, "has a raised football in the center, the word 'Bacon' at each



end, and the initial 'M,' reversible to a 'W' when the slab is hung the other way."

It became known as the "slab of bacon," with the winner of the Badgers-Gophers football game gaining possession until the next meeting. It changed hands across a dozen years, and then, in 1943, the slab of bacon disappeared after a Gopher victory in Minnesota.

A *Star Tribune* article the Monday following the game said a Badgers manager had tried to present it in the Gophers' locker room, only to be told "all trophies are frozen for the duration" of World War II.

The slab of bacon wasn't seen again in public for 50 years, when it was unearthed in Madison in 1994 by a UW athletics intern cleaning a storage room. Oddly, it hadn't been completely ignored. Somebody had written on it the scores of the Badgers-Gophers games from 1943 to 1970 in thick black marker, according to a 2023 *New York Times* series on college sports mysteries.

By the time the missing slab was discovered, the rivalry had another trophy: the Paul Bunyan Axe, donated by the Badgers' National W Club. It was presented for the first time in Minneapolis in January 1949, at halftime of the Badgers-Gophers basketball game. Gopher football legend Francis "Pug" Lund accepted it, Minnesota having won the 1948 game 16-0.

Today's tradition of the winning team feigning to chop down the goalposts with the axe did not happen immediately. Richter, who played in the early 1960s, said he and his teammates never swung the axe.

Minnesota sports historian Ryan Barland looked into the origin of the chopping and couldn't pinpoint it precisely, noting that "the practice was started in the 1980s (at the earliest)."

The November 1962 football game took the rivalry to new heights — and Gophers fans are still mad about it.

The chopping is a big deal now. Andy Crooks '08 was a high school All-State player in Wausau in the early 2000s prior to coming to the UW, where he first played linebacker, then tight end. Crooks always wanted to be a Badger, but his high school girlfriend's parents were Gophers who serenaded him with the Minnesota fight song.

"That 'Ski-U-Mah' stuff," Crooks says.

He wasn't having it. Crooks arrived in Madison fully versed in the rivalry.

"There is not a better feeling," he says, "than taking that axe and chopping those posts down. There's nothing more disheartening than when a team runs across the field and takes [the axe] from you."

The original Paul Bunyan's Axe is now in possession of the College Football Hall of Fame, the W Club having replaced it in 2000.

An Upset and an Abdication

In a memorable 1961 game in Minneapolis, with a Rose Bowl bid on the line for Minnesota, the Badgers upset the Gophers, 23-21. Richter caught two touchdown passes, and Minnesota fans were furious.

The loss left the Ohio State Buckeyes with a better record than the Gophers. Remarkably, however, the Ohio State faculty voted 28-25 to reject the Rose Bowl bid.

A faculty member told *Sports Illustrated*: "We're upset that the image of Ohio State is that the school is merely an appendage to the football team."

There was a near riot in Columbus. Some 2,000 students "burned members of the faculty in effigy," the magazine reported, "snake-danced down the main street, and surrounded the capitol building."

The bid went instead to Minnesota, and the Gophers won the 1962 Rose Bowl, 21-3, over UCLA.

From Ecstasy to Shambles

Even the fiercest rivalries have ebbs and flows, and for a time — a decade starting in 2004 — the football Badgers dominated the Gophers.

One game seems to particularly haunt Gopher fans. In 2005, in Minneapolis, the Gophers had the ball and a 34-31 lead with less than a minute to go. Forced to punt near their own end zone, the unthinkable happened. The Badgers blocked the punt and recovered the ball for a touchdown, securing a 38-34 Badgers win.

“It was a home game,” says Minnesota’s Barland, who was a Gopher student at the time. “We were beating our rivals. To go from that ecstasy to shambles was a foundational part of my college experience.”

Five years after the blocked punt, in October 2010, UW head football coach Bret Bielema drew the ire of Gopher fans when he had the Badgers go for a two-point conversion after taking a 41-16 lead with under seven minutes to play in Madison.

Was Wisconsin running up the score?

The all-time series between the Badgers and Gophers in women's hockey is nearly as close as that of football. Below: the 2019 championship showdown.

“A very poor decision,” Gophers coach Tim Brewster said afterward. “It was wrong.”

“We Bring Out the Best in Each Other”

The Badgers-Gophers rivalry has also been heated in both men’s and women’s hockey.

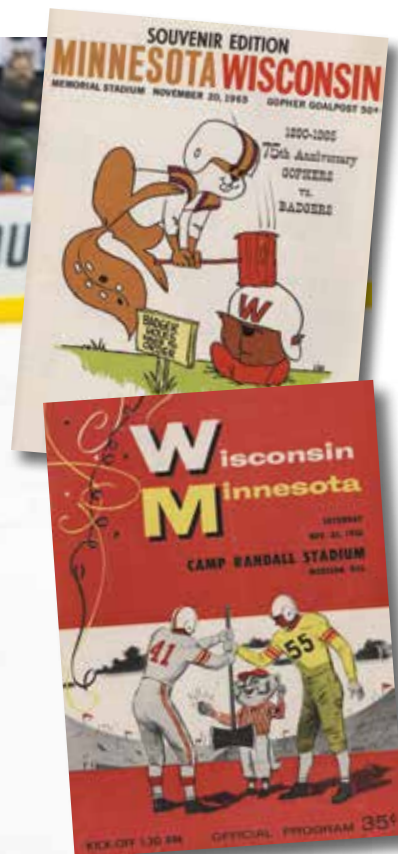
The NCAA sanctioned women’s hockey in 2000, and since then the Badgers have won eight national championships and the Gophers six.

Writing about the rivalry in 2019, the *Star Tribune* called it “fierce.” The occasion was the 2019 national championship game between the Badgers and Gophers. The Badgers won, 2-0, behind a 27-save performance by goaltender Kristen Campbell ’20.

Gophers coach Brad Frost said, “We bring out the best in each other.”

The all-time series in women’s hockey is nearly as close as that of football. When the Badgers and Gophers met last, in March 2025, in the semifinals of the Frozen Four, each team had 57 wins, and there had been 16 ties.

The Badgers won, 6-2, securing a one-win advantage in the border-battle series and going on to win their NCAA-record eighth national championship.





“They Hit You to Hate You”

The Badgers-Gophers rivalry in men's ice hockey dates to 1922 (a two-game sweep by the Gophers), but from 1936 to 1964 they didn't play, as Badger athletics discontinued hockey until November 1963.

The apex of the rivalry arrived in the following decade and centered on two larger-than-life head coaches.

Bob Johnson and Herb Brooks had much in common: both had played hockey for the Gophers, and both would coach the men's hockey Olympic team. They were energetic, quotable, and terrific coaches. There was one more thing.

“History tells us they're probably two of the greatest American coaches ever,” says sportswriter Brophy, who knew and covered them both. “But they truly didn't like each other.”

In the 1970s, Johnson coached the Badgers and Brooks the Gophers.

“I was struck with the level of dislike between the two programs,” Brophy says.

Mike Eaves '78 was a star player for the Badgers team that won the 1977 NCAA championship. Eaves later coached the Badgers, and in 2002 he spoke to *Capital Times* sports columnist Joe Hart about the intensity of the Badgers-Gophers hockey rivalry.

Eaves described entering the Minneapolis arena as a player, taking the ice and thinking, “Holy moly, this is hate. ... The tenacity on the ice was incredible. When they hit you, they hit you to hate you. It was special.”

A men's hockey game in 1981, during a period of intense mutual dislike.

What about the Badgers-Gophers rivalry in men's and women's basketball? To watch video highlights of the teams' 2025 matchups, see this story on our website, onwisconsin.uwalumni.com.

In November 1977, eight months after the Badgers won the national title, the Gophers were coming to Madison for a two-game weekend series at the Dane County Coliseum. During the week, at a luncheon in Minneapolis, Brooks made a comment about the Badger hockey fans.

“They get about 8,000 people in there,” Brooks said, “and half of them are drunk.”

Word drifted back to Madison. Some enterprising Badger fans concocted a photo of Brooks sucking on a beer can and distributed copies to fans seated near the Gophers coach.

“There were hundreds of them being held up behind the bench,” Brophy says. “It got to Herb. After the game, in the area where Herb was doing his press conference, some kid from the band asked Herb to sign the photo. Herb grabbed the guy and threw him up against the wall. Then he cooled off. But it was like, ‘Wow!’ It was real. He really didn't care for Wisconsin and Wisconsin didn't care for him.”

Ironically, within a few years, Bob Johnson's son, Mark '94 — who now coaches the powerhouse Badgers women's hockey team — would star on the 1980 Olympic “miracle” team that won the gold medal. Their coach? Herb Brooks. ●

Doug Moe '79 is a longtime Wisconsin journalist and author.



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Celebrate your Badger pride with this year's collectible design, featuring the Camp Randall arch, inspired by vintage travel posters! Plus, 25% of proceeds support need-based scholarships through the Wisconsin Alumni Association.



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ILANA BAR-AN

Building a Building Legacy

An athlete and a fast learner, Elzie Higginbottom '65 turned a track scholarship into a real estate education.

Elzie Higginbottom '65 ran his way to the UW, and then he ran his way into the university's record books. After he completed his degree, he kept right on running, straight up the corporate ladder to a position as one of Illinois's leading real estate executives.

Higginbottom grew up in Chicago Heights, just a few miles south of the heart of Chicago. He was athletic, which helped him land a track scholarship at the UW, where he ran the 440-yard dash and anchored the Badgers' mile-relay team. A four-year star, Higginbottom won the Big Ten championship in the indoor mile race in 1963, and he was an all-American in the 440. In 1963, he set the UW school record in that race, with a time of 46 seconds — a record that held until 1983.

But in the classroom, he was attracted to real estate. Inspired by his grandparents' farm, he studied agricultural economics, and in the summer, he worked for Baird & Warner, a Chicago real estate firm. The summer job led to a full-time position after graduation. He developed an expertise in finance and helped lead Baird & Warner's effort to create a division that focused on government-assisted housing.

"At that time, it was a growing area," he says,

Elzie Higginbottom was inducted into Alumni Park in 2022. You can read more about him and other honorees at alumnipark.com.

"but keep in mind that this was 1965, and I was the first African American hired at Baird & Warner. The opportunity at that time for Blacks was not exactly the same as it is today. The fact that I was doing government-assisted housing removed some of the barriers that I would have faced had I been trying to focus on conventionally financed housing."

Higginbottom helped Black families get homes in neighborhoods that had previously been all white. The work wasn't always easy, and he frequently ran up against prejudice. But he credits his Badger network with helping him overcome obstacles.

"The support that you would get from the alums and the people you interacted with at the university was very strong," he says. "I think that it is one of the things that helped me succeed in my career."

After 18 years with Baird & Warner, Higginbottom decided to launch his own firm, East Lake Management, which has since grown to be one of Illinois's largest real-estate development companies.

He continues to maintain close ties with his alma mater. Three of his four kids went to UW-Madison, and he's frequently supported scholarships — including the Chancellor's Scholarship Program — that aid students from underrepresented backgrounds.

"I had such a good experience in the university," he says. "I felt that it would be important if more Black students had an opportunity to experience Wisconsin. I always found the faculty as well as the students at Wisconsin very inviting."

JOHN ALLEN

On Alumni

News from Home and Abroad

Research Universities at Risk

Policy experts spell out the threats facing UW-Madison and higher ed.

The Wisconsin Alumni Association's *UW Now* livestream talks explore a wide variety of topics with UW leaders and experts. The program began in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but recent livestreams have covered tariffs, the national debt, wildfires, and conflicts around the globe.

The livestream has also looked at the ways that national and state politics affect UW-Madison. On June's livestream, political scientist **Ken Goldstein** joined **Craig Thompson '91**, UW-Madison's vice chancellor for university relations, and host **Mike Knetter** for a discussion about the effect that public perception and government policies are having on research universities.

Since the start of 2025, governments at the state and national level have pushed policies that would undercut university funding, both in admissions and research.

Thompson described the important role that the federal government has had in nurturing universities, as well as the role that universities have had in growing America's economy. The Trump administration's announcement of cuts to research funding has put this symbiotic relationship in jeopardy, but so far, the administration has made more of an impact through sowing confusion than it has in pulling back actual dollars.

"The word that I really want to underscore is *uncertainty*," Thompson said. "The actual cuts are significant but not dramatic



ANDY MANIS

yet. ... But the rapidity with which the new terms are coming in, the things that they're asking higher education to agree to ... there's still a lot in jeopardy."

Despite the current danger, general survey questions can miss out on the positive emotional relationship that people have with specific universities.

Goldstein looked at public opinion surveys to see how attitudes drive politics. "From 2015 to 2023," he said, "we've seen a little bit of a drop [in confidence in higher education] from Democrats, a little bit of a drop from independents, but Republicans have fallen off a cliff."

"My favorite [question] asks, 'Are you better off or worse off because of the University of Wisconsin?'" The responses, he notes, show that people still believe that specific institutions are valuable. "That has not gone off a cliff."

You can view the entire livestream, as well as previous episodes, at youtube.com/wisconsinalumni-association. To find out how you can advocate for legislative support for UW-Madison, visit uwalumni.com/advocate/.

JOHN ALLEN

646

Number of active users of the Social Badgers program, with 92 signing up in the last year

2,123

Number of Wisconsin Alumni Association posts shared by Social Badgers in the past year

5,527

Number of clicks generated by those posts

POST ON SOCIAL, WIN PRIZES

Have you signed up to be a Social Badger yet? If you volunteer to share UW-Madison news on your social networks, you'll be entered into drawings to receive Badger swag ranging from Bucky squishies to University Book Store gift cards. Visit socialbadgers.socialtoaster.com to learn more.



HANNAH GASPER

DAY OF THE BADGER

April's annual Day of the Badger, the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association's 1,848-minute online giving event, inspired 4,411 donors who gave over \$1.71 million dollars, meeting more than 70 matches and challenges. Since it began in 2019, the event has raised more than \$8.5 million for the university.



ANDY MANNIS

Homecoming Is Where the Heart Is

Enthusiasm for the annual celebration has persisted for more than a century.

The UW held its first Homecoming in 1911, making it one of the first institutions to adopt the popular tradition, alongside Baylor University and the University of Illinois.

Prior to that, the UW had informally invited alumni back for commencement, but organizers soon saw the wisdom of tying visits back to campus to a football game. More than 3,000 people attended the inaugural event, which featured speakers, doughnuts, cider, and cigars. A Homecoming Ball made its debut in 1919, and annual dances continued until 2011. Judges awarded prizes for the best house and float decorations, and a Homecoming king and queen reigned over festivities every year from 1937 until 2011.

Bonfires were considered essential to the fall ritual for decades, culminating in revelers snaking down State Street. They often crossed the line from exuberance into mayhem, rocking cars, throwing objects, and stopping traffic. After a bonfire sparked a State Street riot in 1946, city and university officials canceled that particular expression of school spirit.

During World War II, Homecoming celebrations

The pep rally (shown above in 2024) is one of several enduring celebrations of Badger spirit, along with the parade, fireworks, and more recent additions such as the Block Party.

honored the military. Concerts through the years have drawn national acts such as Tommy Dorsey, Ella Fitzgerald, Harry Belafonte, Simon and Garfunkel, and Dionne Warwick. **Steve Miller x'67** headlined a scholarship benefit concert in 2017, and the student-led Homecoming committee continues to book popular artists today.

The Homecoming parade and pep rally, long essential events, are still highlights of what has become a week's worth of activities.

In recent years, the Wisconsin Alumni Association began sponsoring a multicultural tailgate as well as the Multicultural Homecoming Yard Show, and the Block Party has become another popular addition. It features activities such as a silent disco, face-painting and crafts for children, fireworks, and yard games in Alumni Park. The week also includes Fill the Hill, a fundraiser that involves planting plastic flamingos on Bascom Hill to symbolize gifts made to the university, riffing off a beloved 1979 prank by the student-government Pail and Shovel Party.

Bucky Badger, who made his debut at the 1949 Homecoming game, will feature prominently this year. Fans will have a chance to learn what it's like to play the beloved mascot at a showing of the PBS documentary *Being Bucky*. This year's Homecoming events will take place the week of October 5, culminating in the football game against the Iowa Hawkeyes on October 11.

NIKI DENISON



40s-60s

When Brigadier General **Lew Harned '47** turned 99 years old in 2023, he made a list of things he'd like to do before he turned 100 the following year. "Lew's List" ran the gamut from catching a show at the Bartell Theatre in Madison and picking cherries in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, to flying a World War II B-25 bomber and adaptive waterskiing on the Mississippi River. By his 100th birthday in 2024, Harned had crossed 107 new experiences off his list. His centennial endeavor and life of service are memorialized in the children's book *Lew for the Red, White, and Blue* by Natalie Popp. Harned drove ambulances in Italy during World War II as a volunteer for the American Field Service. After graduating from the UW, he attended medical school and returned to the service as a surgeon with the Air Force during the Korean War. He was an orthopedic surgeon in the Wisconsin Army National Guard when he was promoted to commander and deployed to the Middle East during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

That's Doctor Morelock, to you: **Virginia Morelock '51** of Orange County, California, graduated from Liberty University with her EdD in curriculum and instruction in elementary education. Morelock is a lifelong teacher and taught science and math at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels before retiring at age 62.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she enrolled in Liberty University Online Programs to complete the doctoral studies she started at the University of California-Los Angeles in 1963. "I do not have a lengthy bucket list; I just have one thing," she told her family when she began classes. "I have always wanted to finish my doctorate." Morelock, who is legally blind, finished the program in September 2024 with straight As and walked the commencement stage in May.

"I do not have a lengthy bucket list; I just have one thing: I have always wanted to finish my doctorate."

— Virginia Morelock '51

Theodore Cohen '60, MS'61, PhD'66 braved the cold for a story that warms our hearts: "As a grad student in 1961-62, I traveled to the Antarctic to assist in geological research and establish the first gravity network on the Antarctic Peninsula. This austral summer, I returned to the frozen continent with Pam, my wife of four months, to visit my old haunts. ... Our stop at Deception Island was particularly meaningful. That we also renewed our vows on the ship (we wanted to get married down there but needed a Norwegian license) made the trip even more fun." Congratulations to the newlyweds!

Award-winning *National Geographic* photographer **Steve Raymer '67, MA'71** donated the archive of his life's work to the Wisconsin Historical Society in 2024. The collection includes more than 2,000 digital files, nearly 200 archival color prints, and more than 7,000 color transparencies from three decades as a photojournalist and news service director with *National*

Far left: Virginia Morelock finished her doctorate at age 94. Right: Theodore Cohen and his wife, Pam, renewed their marriage vows on a ship in Antarctica.



Geographic. After cutting his teeth covering the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations on the UW campus for the *Daily Cardinal*, Raymer jumped into work that took him to more than 100 countries as he chased stories about the Vietnam and Cold Wars, the opium poppy, the world hunger crisis, and the trade of endangered animals. "Character traits of the best journalists I've met are persistence and resilience and to say 'I'm not going to take no for an answer,'" Raymer told the UW School of Journalism and Mass Communications last year. "Your mission comes first. Whatever your job is, you've got to get it done. Quitting isn't an option." Raymer is a professor emeritus of journalism at Indiana University-Bloomington.

70s-80s

It takes guts to do the kind of work **Donald Dafoe '71, MD'75** does every day. Dafoe is an abdominal organ recovery surgeon. He currently works with LifeGift, an organ procurement organization serving north, southeast, and west Texas. Dafoe was previously on the faculty at the University of California-Irvine and has been a leader in the transplant field.

After a 17-year sales career, **Joyce Feustel '71, MS'73, MA'80** of Denver is helping fellow baby boomers boost their businesses with social media through Boomers' Social Media Tutor. She specializes in LinkedIn and Facebook and reaches clients through individual trainings and group workshops.

Michael Vickerman '78

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 uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit • Class Notes, Wisconsin Alumni Association, 1848 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53726

has retired after 33 years with RENEW Wisconsin, a renewable energy nonprofit. Vickerman joined RENEW as a program coordinator in 1991 and became executive director in 1994. He most recently served as clean-energy deployment manager. Over more than three decades with RENEW, Vickerman helped to shape renewable energy policy and partner with industry stakeholders to promote the adoption of clean energy sources. In retirement, he will continue to sit on the organization's board of directors.

In May, **Fabu Phillis Carter MA'80, MA'81** performed "Remember Me: Mary Lou Williams in Poetry and Music" alongside Madison jazz pianist Jane Reynolds at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. The performance was part of the 2025 Mary Lou Williams Jazz Festival. Williams was an influential jazz pianist and composer; she conducted a residency at UW-Madison in 1976. Carter is a poet and outreach program manager with the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. In 2008, she became the first African American to serve as Madison Poet Laureate.

Phil Neuman '80, JD'83 was named the Malcolm N. Bennett Advocate of the Year by the National Apartment Association at its Assembly of Delegates meeting last November. Neuman has spent more than three decades advocating for the rental housing industry, including as a longtime member of the National Apartment Association's legislative committee and as chair of its Detroit-branch legislative committee. He is a shareholder at Couzens Lansky law firm in Farmington Hills, Michigan.

The Association of Croatian American Professionals (ACAP) presented **Tomislav**

Mama Bear

Karen Murphy '93 is one of the rare women to serve as COO for an NFL team.

Growing up in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, in a family of rabid sports fans, **Karen Murphy '93** cheered for the Badgers and Packers.

Today, she still cheers for the Badgers. The Packers? Not since 1999, when Murphy was hired as a controller by the Chicago Bears.

"It was an interesting transition," she says. In October 2000, Murphy followed the Bears to a game at Lambeau Field.

"I realized I was truly cheering for the Bears," she says, chuckling. "I knew I had fully converted."

In the ensuing 25 years, Murphy has become one of the Bears' top executives, currently serving as executive vice president of stadium development and chief operating officer.

When she attended UW-Madison, Murphy's dad, an accountant, suggested she should consider the field.

"I took a couple of classes, and they went really well," she says. "Everyone else hated them. I thought, 'This is probably what I should do.'"

Murphy liked the "work hard, play hard" vibe on campus, and she found the UW to be "a very collaborative school. I learned to work together in groups instead of always trying to outshine someone else."

After a stint with Ernst and Young in Chicago, in 1997 she went to work for the Walt Disney Company, which had recently acquired the Anaheim Angels baseball team. Murphy worked on the Angels account, sitting in an office, as it happened, adjacent to another UW grad, **Rick Schlesinger '83**.

"He's now the president of the Milwaukee Brewers," she says. "I remember talking to him about Madison and getting a real understanding of what it meant to work for a sports team."

Murphy realized she wanted to work for an athletic franchise full-time, so she sent résumés to 70 teams. The Bears had an opening, and she had friends there from her earlier time in the city. It was a good fit.

Murphy then worked her way up the ladder, often finding herself the only female in the room at meetings.

"I was the only woman in leadership until around 2016," she says, noting she had to create a maternity leave policy. "But I relished that." She knew sports, and at the same time, she was able to offer a different perspective.

Murphy began her current role in 2024. Getting a new Bears stadium built — most likely in suburban Arlington Heights — is a daunting challenge, but she relishes that, too.

Meanwhile, Murphy has a son enrolling at UW-Madison this fall. Luckily, she can still cheer for the Badgers.

DOUG MOE '79



COURTESY OF JACOB FUNK

Garbage Man

Steve Marker '89 has made a lifelong career producing and performing alternative rock music.

Steve Marker '89 learned an important life lesson while attending UW–Madison: “It really taught me to stick up for myself when it came to what I wanted,” he says. “To not just go with the flow and do the prescribed route.”

That lesson led to decades-long success not only for Marker as a musician, record producer, and engineer, but also for his band Garbage. The band — also featuring **Butch Vig '80**, Shirley Manson, and Duke Erikson — released its eighth album, *Let All That We Imagine Be the Light*, and is celebrating the 30th anniversary of its self-titled debut.

Marker met Vig and Erikson while living in Madison, as a fan and eventually the sound engineer for their band Spooner. He also “lurked” with Vig in the basement of the Humanities Building, “trying to get access to all those cool synthesizers they had down there.”

Marker later created a home studio in his basement that featured his four-track reel-to-reel deck and Vig’s microphones.

In 1983, Marker and Vig launched Smart Studios, which soon became a haven for bands looking for a place to record. Marker has produced and/or engineered music by Killdozer, Gumball, Robert Plant, The Weeds, The Heart Throbs, Pop Will Eat Itself, Tar Babies, Poopshovel, L7, and many more. Vig went on to work with national record label Sub Pop and produced bands such as Nirvana.

Marker admits that the widespread attention they received surprised him. He didn’t think that “these first punk-rock records we were making on East Washington for a few hundred bucks” would lead to them getting global airplay. “All of a sudden, we started making these records that were getting played in London and Australia,” he says.

In the early '90s, Marker, Vig, and Erikson got the itch to start a band. They brought in Manson as lead singer and formed Garbage. Marker says it was refreshing to create a “different and interesting” pop sound with strong female vocals after working mostly with male vocalists and harder rock music. The band got its name when a friend commented that a remix that was still in its rough stages sounded like garbage. “So we thought we’d call ourselves that, which seemed like a good idea at the time,” says Marker.

He doesn’t think Garbage would have been as “creative or cool or interesting” without the UW’s influence.

“There’s a bit of an underdog, us-against-them mentality that you get from living in the Midwest more than you might on the coast,” he says. “That has stuck with us and kept us going.”

JOSHUA M. MILLER



LEVI TEODORSKY

Kuzmanovic '85, JD'88 with its 2024 Professional Excellence Award in Law, Governance, and Public Policy. Kuzmanovic is the managing partner of Hinshaw & Culbertson’s Milwaukee law firm. He has 35 years of experience in U.S. and international litigation, including international human rights law while defending the Republic of Croatia in its pursuit of independence.

Congratulations to **James Thompson '85, MS'87, PhD'91** on his retirement from Qualcomm Technologies. Thompson joined the company in 1992 and helped establish it at the forefront of wireless technology. He held many executive leadership roles, including executive vice president of engineering and, most recently, chief technology officer. In addition to providing educational and employment opportunities for students and fellow alumni of the UW’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Thompson also facilitated the creation of the department’s James H. Thompson Electronics Design Studio, the Qualcomm Design Lab, and multiple professorships in honor of his family. Here’s to a restful retirement after a remarkable career!

90s

It’s time to talk about **Charles Maxwell MS'90**, which is only fair: he spends a lot of time thinking about time. Maxwell is a clockmaker in Rochester, New York, and at a June 2025 competition, the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors honored him with two prizes: first place in the category of wood clocks and the People’s Choice Award. Maxwell, a retired Navy veteran, makes hardwood clocks, and though he has no formal training, each of his creations is a work of art as well as a working timepiece.

If you're looking for financial advice, you would be wise to listen to **Shankar Iyer '93**. A 30-year veteran with the financial firm Merrill, Iyer was named to the 2025 Illinois Best-in-State Wealth Advisers list from *Forbes* magazine. Iyer works in Chicago, where he cofounded the Verschuur/Iyer Group within Merrill. Iyer is known for facilitating "family summits," in which he helps his clients consider how to manage their funds to support multiple generations.

Alison Prange '94 is the new managing director of Madison-based lobbying and strategic communications firm Michael Best Strategies. She comes to the role from the MKE 2024 Host Committee, where she served as chief operating officer alongside CEO **Ted Kellner '69** to welcome visitors to Milwaukee for the 2024 Republican National Convention.

Ian Chalgren '96 of Madison has retired as senior art director of American Family Insurance. Over his 25-year career there, Chalgren helped develop the company's brand identity, designed collateral and advertisements, and directed award-winning television spots. He also helped design and publish the books *Dare to Dream: The Remarkable Story of American Family Insurance* and *Let's Talk about It: The Art, the Artists, and the Racial Justice Movement on Madison's State Street*. In retirement, Chalgren is turning his attention to — *BOOM!* *BANG!* *KAPOW!* — comic-book design. His recent projects include coediting *The Art of the Amazing Spider-Man* with Dark Horse Comics and *Conan the Barbarian: Colossal Edition* with Pan-Universal Galactic Worldwide.

Dustin Block '98 of Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan, is the new director of portfolio

growth at digital marketing agency BlueLena. He works with the American Journalism Project to develop and execute growth strategies for local and nonprofit news organizations. Block began his 25-year career in media as a journalist before transitioning to consulting. He comes to BlueLena from Blue Engine Collaborative, where he was an audience development coach, and Viafoura, where he developed data-driven audience engagement tools for publishers.

Whether you're embracing #vanlife or simply looking for a practical way to take the whole family on the road, **Brian '98, MS'10** and **Heidi '02 Don-dlinger** are miles ahead of your minivan with their company, Orion Motors. The UW mechanical engineering alumni were well-versed in Wisconsin-based product development — Brian through work at Harley-Davidson, and Heidi through GE HealthCare — when they started Orion Motors in their Milwaukee garage, developing industry-changing vans. They passed their 50-customer milestone earlier this year.

Ryan Schanhofer '99 is the new CEO of KL Engineering, a civil engineering firm in Madison, after the retirement of founder Kim Lobdell. Schanhofer joined the company in 2009 as a construction and branch manager and was promoted to senior vice president before being named president in 2022.

00s

We're all smiles for **Hana Alberti '00** of Franklin, Wisconsin, who was promoted to vice president of dental practice by the American Dental Association (ADA). She most recently served as senior director of the ADA's Center for Dental Practice Policy and oversaw the Council on Dental Practice. In her new role, Alberti will develop continuing

education and workforce-development strategies for entire dental teams.

Camille Bernier MA'00, PhD'10 is back on the UW campus as a senior academic adviser in the School of Education. Bernier, a citizen of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, was a senior academic adviser with the

"Character traits of the best journalists I've met are persistence and resilience and to say, 'I'm not going to take no for an answer.' ... Your mission comes first. Whatever your job is, you've got to get it done."

— Steve Raymer '67, MA'71

UW's Cross-College Advising Service from 2011 to 2021 before joining Madison Area Technical College as a student support adviser.

For Your Eyes Only, the cybersecurity firm founded by Denver-based CEO **Tammy Kahn '03**, recently launched the beta version of its password manager, KryptPass. KryptPass offers premium password security and identity-monitoring services that alert users to compromised data in real time. Kahn started her career in digital marketing and cofounded one of the first social media marketing platforms, MarketMeSuite, in 2009. She also held executive positions in online marketing and cryptocurrency before founding For Your Eyes Only in 2021.

Check it out! **Rachel Fewell MA'04** is the new director of the Englewood Public Library in Englewood, Colorado. She comes to Englewood from the Denver Public Library, where she was director of its central branch and helped facilitate the library's programming for people

experiencing homelessness. “To me, it’s really important to think about who’s most vulnerable in a community and who needs the library the most, and then start to make a path toward breaking down those barriers that might exist,” she told Colorado Community Media.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) appointed **Brad Schulteis ’05** to serve as deputy intelligence community chief information officer. Schulteis will oversee secure collaboration and information-sharing, artificial intelligence and machine learning, quantum computing, and software development. Prior to joining ODNI, Schulteis was director of cloud and security solutions at consulting company Slalom.

Kerry Yang ’05 made a Badger-sized difference in her community when she cofounded Hmong Autism Neurodiverse Disability Support (HANDS) in Green Bay. Yang founded the nonprofit in honor of her son, who was diagnosed with autism at age three, and her nephew, who was born with a physical disability. HANDS hopes to raise awareness of neurodivergence and physical disabilities in the Hmong community and to reach affected families across linguistic and cultural barriers while providing a space to celebrate Hmong culture. Yang is the community liaison and special events coordinator for the City of Green Bay Mayor’s Office.

After a long career in clinical practice, veterinarian **Anna Peterson DVM’09** of Poplar, Wisconsin, has transitioned into offering in-home euthanasia services through CodaPet. She values the privilege of helping clients through the most difficult stage of the human-animal bond.

DEATH NOTICES • NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE, AND EMAIL UPDATES
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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.

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.

10s

Ben Schmidt MBA’12 joined the UW’s Division of Facilities Planning & Management as the new associate director of real estate. He will oversee real estate transactions in support of the UW–Madison campus. Schmidt comes to the role from Fiore Companies, where he served as senior vice president of real estate.

Congrats to these newlyweds — and on, WiscBraamsin! **“Collin ’16 and Angelina ’17 Braam** celebrated their marriage in November 2024,” they wrote. “The Badgers have been together since meeting at the Kollege Klub in 2016. Their favorite memories together include the football upset against LSU at Lambeau [Field in 2016], multiple trips to see their beloved Badgers compete for the Big Ten Title in Indianapolis, and of course, pitchers and ice cream at the Terrace. ... Their wedding celebration was filled with Badger friends and family and, in true Wisconsin fashion, they opened the dance floor with ‘Jump Around.’”

Marilyn “Marina” Matusky ’16’s career has gone off with a pop. After earning her degree in theoretical mathematics, she applied herself to a practical issue: making nonalcoholic beverages. She now runs a consultancy that helps beverage entrepreneurs launch and grow their nonalcoholic dreams in a rapidly growing marketplace.

Badger athletes are making volleyball history as members of League One Volleyball (LOVB) Madison, the city’s first professional volleyball team. Setter **Lauren Carlini ’17** played for the Badgers from 2013 to 2016 before a professional career in Europe. She also played for Team USA, with whom she won silver in the 2024 Olympics. Carlini returned to Wisconsin in

2024 as an offensive analyst and strategy consultant for UW volleyball. Fellow LOVB Madison Badgers include **Temí Thomas-Ailara MSx’23**, an opposite hitter who started her professional career with the San Diego Mojo, and outside hitter **Sarah Franklin x’25** (see Contender, Spring 2025), a former Badger captain and 2024 ESPY nominee for Best College Athlete, Women’s Sports. After delivering the first serve of their inaugural season in the Wisconsin Field House in January, LOVB Madison placed third in the league.

20s

Samantha Busch ’20, MD’25 hasn’t been practicing long, but she’s already making an impression both inside her field — family medicine — and in the wider Wisconsin community. Busch is a product of UW–Madison’s TRIUMPH program — Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health — and she has already logged experience working with BadgerCare Plus, doing Medicaid enrollment in Dane County Jail, and helping to launch a satellite clinic in one of Milwaukee County’s most underserved areas. Her work earned her a Pisacano Leadership Foundation scholarship and recognition from the American Association of Family Physicians. “I want to be the best clinician I can be,” she says, “and that starts with learning what resources are available — and just listening.”

Extra, extra! **Enjoyiana Nururdin ’21** is a local government reporter with the *Capital Times* in Madison. Nururdin came to the *Cap Times* in 2024 from WKOW 27 News, where she was an assignment editor and digital content producer. While studying reporting at the UW, she was a managing editor of the *Black Voice*, the UW’s student newspaper by

and for the Black community. She graduated from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism with her master's in politics in 2022. "Stay curious and determined to preserve humanity in your work," she advised aspiring journalists in the UW School of Journalism and Mass Communication in July. "Be willing to fall into the rabbit hole to discover the truth, however that looks."

Hey, sharks! **Jake Piekarski '24** of Huntington Beach, California, landed a deal with businessman Mark Cuban on the reality television show *Shark Tank*. Piekarski is the founder and CEO of Snow Scholars, a residential snow-removal company he started on the UW campus in 2022. The company has since expanded to six Midwestern universities and employs 300 students. Snow Scholars was one of 120 businesses chosen from 105,000 applicants to pitch on *Shark Tank*. Their episode aired in December 2024, during which Piekarski received Cuban's \$150,000 investment for a 20 percent share in the company.

When **Noela Campbell JDx'25** completes her law degree, she will become a fifth-generation Badger alum. Her UW ancestors include her father, **Howard MA'84, MA'85, PhD'90** (who shared the news with us), as well as **Howard Campbell '46, MS'47, PhD'49; Ruth Campbell '50; Wayland Noland '48; Ruth Wayland Noland 1917, MA1920; and Lowell Noland MA1920, PhD1923**. Together they account for a grand total of 13 UW-Madison sheepskins: four bachelor's, five master's, three doctoral degrees and one JD — Noela is the first law grad in the lot.

Megan Provost '20 may or may not already have her Halloween decorations out.



KAREN ZAZZA

A Family Affair

The DeWolfs have discovered the joys of intergenerational giving.

Suzy Oldorf DeWolf '94 and her husband, **Chris**, know a thing or two about loyalty and commitment. They met in preschool, dated throughout their teens, and attended different colleges before tying the knot in 1995. The two are co-owners of Lil' Drug Store Products, a second-generation, family-owned business that is the leading supplier of over-the-counter medicines to convenience stores, travel hubs, hospitality providers, and other alternative retail outlets. They also own ForeFold Ventures, a family office focused on private investment and philanthropy. They have long been active in supporting causes in their home community of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

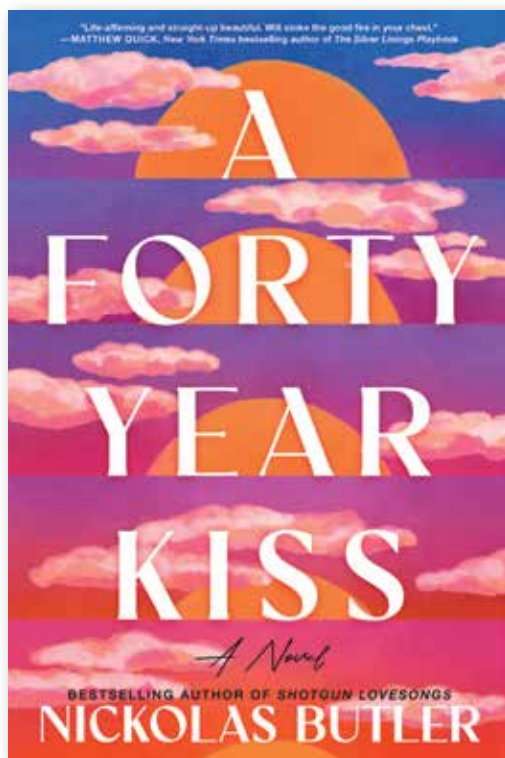
Already supporters of higher education, the couple decided several years ago that they wanted to extend their reach beyond the state of Iowa. They contacted the UW to see how they might plug in. Together with university administrators, they created a new study-abroad program for first-year students and funded scholarships for the Global Launch program. Then, they expanded their giving to the School of Human Ecology, UW athletics, and the Wisconsin School of Business. Their daughter **Lindsay DeWolf '24** is a School of Business graduate, and their son, **Weston DeWolf x'26**, will graduate from the school next spring. Their other daughter, **Riley Nassif**, graduated from the University of Iowa. (Shown above from left are Chris, Suzy, Riley, Lindsay, and Weston.)

Suzy says that within the last decade, the couple decided to make a more conscious effort to enjoy the impact of their giving during their lifetime. They chose to add UW-Madison to their extensive giving portfolio because "Wisconsin is a highly regarded institution, and we want to continue that legacy," Suzy says. "It's a great place, and people naturally want to be a part of it. It's like a big family." In addition, she says, the university "gave me a great foundation, and having two kids go there is extra special."

Both Suzy's and Chris's parents led by example, giving to their churches and other causes in their community, "but we've definitely taken it to another level," Suzy says. The two were deliberate in instilling the habit of giving in their own children at an early age. And now, as young adults, the DeWolf children have become even more involved. Prior to starting a family foundation, the DeWolfs used their local community foundation as a vehicle to make donations, and the children have been charged with directing gifts from the family's endowed fund. Lindsay and Weston also participate in Day of the Badger giving each year.

"We're learning together," Suzy says. "It brings us joy. It's fun, and it keeps us connected as a family."

NIKI DENISON



Butler's novel was inspired by a conversation overheard in a Wisconsin bar.

Love Me Two Times

In *A Forty Year Kiss*, Nickolas Butler '02 gives a past romance another chance.

Nickolas Butler '02 was sitting at a bar in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, when he overheard the exchange — and witnessed the kiss — that inspired his most recent novel.

Butler may not have caught the names of the reunited couple at the bar, but in *A Forty Year Kiss*, they're Charlie and Vivian, who married young and gave it four years before filing for divorce. Forty years later, Charlie is still battling old demons when he lands back in Wisconsin, intent on reconnecting with Vivian and righting the wrongs of their youth. Forty years is a lot of time to make up for — but how long is too long for true love, and what would you give up for it?

The romantic *Forty Year Kiss* is a thematic departure from Butler's most recent work, 2021's literary thriller *Godspeed*. But the author of the critically acclaimed debut novel *Shotgun Lovesongs* is no stranger to a love story, and the western-Wisconsin writer infuses as much local flavor into this novel as he does sincerity and care for his characters.

"I don't need to do a lot of research to write a book about Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin," he told the *Chicago Review of Books*. "It was going to be a book I could write passionately."

According to reviewers, Butler's confidence was not misplaced: "Its Midwest is weathered and described with affection and restraint; its people are presented whole and in context, the seldom-seen brought into vivid focus, their yearnings and failings intact," writes *New York Times* bestselling author Leif Enger. "*A Forty Year Kiss* has the courage to suggest it's not too late — for romance, or transcendence, or just to be better."



Gaga Mistake Day **SUSAN BITKER STRAUB '66** **AND EMMA STRAUB MFA'08**

Nothing is too silly or strange during a Gaga Mistake Day! Acclaimed novelist Emma Straub teams up with her mom, Susan, to tell this sweet children's story about memorable "mistakes" — from swapping eyeglasses to reading upside down — that make spending time with Gaga so special for her grandchild. The book features antics from Susan's own experiences as "Gaga" to her grandchildren.



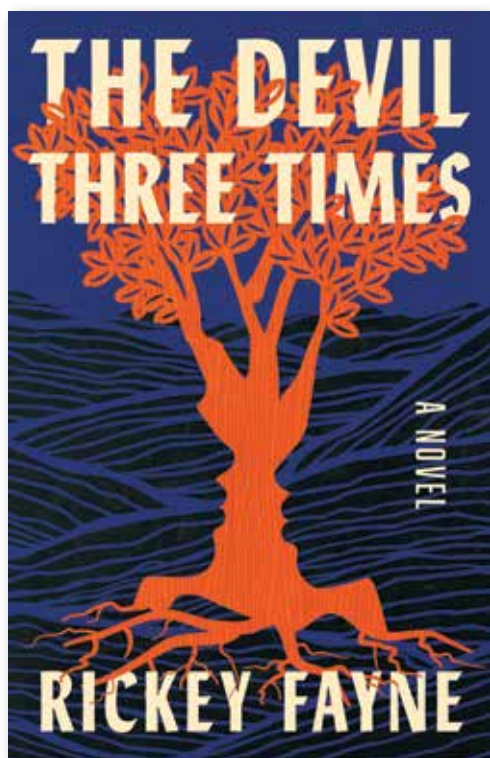
My Dead Friend Zoe **PAUL SCANLAN '93**

This film follows Afghanistan veteran Merit as she tries to acclimate to civilian life while accompanied by the wisecracking ghost of her friend and fellow soldier, Zoe. On top of facing her own postwar trauma with the help of a Veterans Affairs counselor (played by real-life veteran Morgan Freeman), Merit attempts to help her Vietnam-veteran grandfather (Ed Harris) face his. Scanlan was a producer on the movie, which *Variety* ranked as one of the "10 Best Films of 2025 (So Far)."



The Last Session **JULIA BARTZ '06**

Following the success of her 2023 debut novel, *The Writing Retreat*, Bartz introduces readers to Thea, a social worker whose pursuit of a missing client forces her to face her past. The search brings her to a retreat center in New Mexico, where unconventional methods and a questionable couple put her sanity to the test as she tries to rescue her patient — and herself — before it's too late. Bartz is also a licensed therapist in Brooklyn, New York.



Submit your book news at uwalumni.com/go/bookshelf and visit goodreads.com/wisalumni to find more works by Badger alumni and faculty.

Fayne's novel explores spirituality, sacrifice, and salvation.

Deals with the Devil

Rickey Fayne's debut novel traces the consequences of desperation across generations.

Just before the introduction to his debut novel, *The Devil Three Times*, **Rickey Fayne** includes a Laurent family tree. To Fayne's reader, this is a helpful tool for keeping track of the book's characters across its timeline. To Fayne's Devil, the family tree is a map to salvation.

The book opens with Yetunde, a young girl on a slave ship bound for the United States who strikes a bargain with the Devil in order to survive what lies ahead of her. For generations to come, the Devil continues to visit Yetunde's descendants — the Laurent family — offering them his own version of redemption in their darkest moments in pursuit of his own reentry into heaven.

The Devil Three Times is deeply rooted in Fayne's personal experience as the born-and-raised West Tennessean draws on Black spiritual traditions and the oral histories of the Black diaspora.

"With a voice and rhythm that zip and twang like our best-loved Black folktales, this epic family saga unfurls with tender precision, illuminating the dark and light of our very human natures to profound effect," writes **Daniel Moniz MFA'18**, UW assistant professor of English and author of *Milk Blood Heat*.

"This is a page-turning, rollicking novel that is both an intimate family saga and an elegy for the American experience," writes *New York Times* bestselling author Nathan Harris. "This is what literature is all about."

Fayne is a faculty member in the UW's Department of English.



Emperor of Ocean Park **BRADINN FRENCH '08**

In this television series from MGM+, Oliver Garland is a controversial yet influential federal judge. When he dies of a heart attack, his son, an esteemed Ivy League law professor, is heartbroken. His daughter, a former journalist, is suspicious, believing her father was a victim of foul play. As they investigate his death and navigate its aftermath, Garland's children learn surprising details about their controversial father. French is an editor on four of 10 episodes in the show's first season.



Thruhikers: A Guide to Life on the Trail

TIM BEISSINGER '09, MS'11, PHD'14
AND RENEE MILLER '10

Online, the @thruhikers share their hiking, backpacking, canoeing, and camping adventures with people around the world. In this book, they're sharing the tips and tricks that make those trips possible, from what and how to pack for different excursions to convenient recipes to prepare for the journey. The book is intended as a guide for novice hikers and seasoned trekkers alike.



Scorched Earth

TIANA CLARK

In her second full-length poetry collection, Clark explores themes ranging from the loss brought about by her divorce during the COVID-19 pandemic; to queer, Black love; to the first Black *Bachelorette*. From the narrative rubble of her lows, she emerges with radical and transcendent joy. Clark was the 2017–18 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

MEGAN PROVOST '20



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ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Pardon Our Dust

Multiple campus construction projects are positioning UW–Madison for the future.

One usually associates UW–Madison with the colors cardinal and white, but central campus is currently accented in safety-fence orange and concrete-barrier gray. Amid the cones and cranes, streets have temporarily narrowed, and detours have popped up, all signs of a campus under construction.

Unless you're inching down University Avenue in a car, late for a campus meeting (I could have sworn I left early enough), this is a good thing. New construction is a key part of helping the university meet its mission.

"We need this important infrastructure to support our campus community, enable innovative teaching, and advance research that benefits communities across

the state, the country, and the world," says **Cindy Torstveit '91**, associate vice chancellor of Facilities Planning & Management.

The eight-level Phillip A. Levy Engineering Center broke ground last spring at 1430 Engineering Drive, with the goal of accommodating an additional 1,000 undergraduate students per year. Scheduled for a 2028 opening, it will be the first building on campus to use a wonder material called mass timber, which is renewable and fire-resistant.

The five-level Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall at 232 N. Park Street will be a welcome addition to the College of Letters & Science, bringing together eight academic departments that are currently spread across five locations. With a scheduled 2026 opening, it's a step toward vacating the antiquated Humanities Building, which the UW hopes to demolish in the next few years. The building will boast a self-sufficient irrigation system and more than 200 parking spots

Morgridge Hall as it was nearing completion in the summer. The ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held on September 26.



For a video tour of Morgridge Hall, scan the QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/morgridge.

for bicycles. A rooftop garden will provide a lovely backdrop for discussions and collaboration.

"The building will enhance the experience for students taking classes in the humanities, with flexible classrooms that provide the opportunity for more active learning than standard lecture halls," Torstveit says.

Morgridge Hall is the new home for the booming School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences. The eight-level structure was designed as the UW's most sustainable academic building, with solar panels providing about 5 percent of the building's energy. And you can bet that the state-of-the-art classrooms will offer the latest in high-tech connectivity.

Morgridge Hall will open at 1205 University Avenue in time for the fall semester, with nary a cone nor crane in sight. In other words, I'll need a new excuse for being late to campus meetings.

DEAN ROBBINS



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